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Sylium Diaz
Basic Writing
Object Essay
October 3, 2014

Bling, Man's Best Friend

Why do people keep things from their childhood? I kept my stuffed animal Bling which I've had for fourteen years. Bling was a cat that did extraordinary things. He was my knight in shining armor. Just one look at Bling and I knew everything was going to be okay. Bling is important because he reminds me of my dad and helps me cope with fear.

Bling was very inviting. He was cute and cuddly, but overall loyal. His mysterious green eyes would look deep through me. It was an instantaneous connection. His chest was a sunny yellow and the rest of his body was a pinkish-purple. It kind of reminded me of Superman. Bling's name was imprinted on a heart-shaped dog tag, which was connected to his collar. He sat up straight and wore his collar with pride. Another tag Bling had was the one near his tail. Written on it was where he was made, which was in China. Also written was the brand Toymaker. He was about as tall as a Keurig coffee maker. Bling's nose was smashed into his face, his lips sewn on his face. Bling smelled like a pair of brand new Nikes right out the box. His long fur was as soft as a cloud. Whenever I held him I felt like I was in heaven. Every hug felt like fine pillows and quilts on a beautiful bed. Bling was just breathtaking.

I'll never forget the day I got Bling. It was a Saturday evening in the summer. I was on the floor of my living room playing with my sister, Jessie. I was about four years old, my sister five. My mom was getting ready to prepare our baths. We were waiting for my dad to get home from work with dinner. During the week my mom would make dinner and on the weekends it was my dad. Finally my dad came home and he came home with McDonalds. The first thing I did when I got my Happy Meal was to check for the toy. All I found inside was a paper with a teddy bear drawn on it. I was so curious. After I ate, I went to my room and there it was, a new stuffed animal. It wasn't what I expected. I thought it would be a teddy bear because of the picture on the paper, but instead it was a cat. Either way I was happy to get something. "Oh my god. Thank you!" I said screaming.

"You're welcome," my parents said in unison.

"You're the best parents ever!" I said excitedly.

"Promise you'll take good care of him," My mom chimed in.

"Promise," I declared raising my left hand and placing my right hand over my heart. I ran to my dad and he picked me up. I gave my dad and mom a bunch of hugs and kisses. My dad put me down. I turned around and looked at Bling again. He was beautiful. It was love at first sight. My dad had gotten my sister one too, but mine was special. Bling was given to me not only to help me whenever I was scared, but to be my best friend.

Bling was more than just an ordinary stuffed animal. My dad told me that Bling would protect me from whatever I was scared of. He said that Bling had magic. I was a little skeptical at first. My dad told me that all I had to do was tell Bling what I was scared of and Bling would do the rest. One night I heard a noise coming from my window. I was terrified. I remembered what my dad said and grabbed Bling. I told him what I was scared of and squeezed him tight. Once I squeezed him I knew he would protect me. So I went to the window with Bling in my arms. At that moment I didn't feel scared, I felt safe. I moved the curtain slowly and to my surprise, it was

a tree branch hitting the window. I was beyond relieved. Bling was so magical that he gave me courage. It was like the 'Wizard of Oz'. From that moment on I knew that Bling was the one for me.

I have so many fond memories with Bling. One important memory that sticks out the most to me when I think of Bling was the time Bling helped my family. I was about thirteen years old. My family had moved to Haverhill a year before. It was a summer day in August. Dad had a doctor's appointment my family decided to go too. I should've never gone that day. My dad found out he had prostate cancer and he only had six months to live. The doctors suggested putting him in a nursing home where they could care for him and all his needs. I had never seen my dad so scared. This was when I needed Bling the most. We went to the nursing home a couple of weeks later. My dad was finished settling in. We entered the room and my dad was laying on his new bed. I went up to him with Bling in my arms. He stared at me and asked, "What's wrong mi hija?"

"I'm gonna miss you Papi so much," I replied.

"It's ok you can see me or call me whenever you want," he said reassuring me.

"Ok. I brought you something Papi," I said, handing him Bling.

"Are you sure, Silly?" he questioned.

"Yes, papi. You need him more than me right now and I know He'll be there for you just like he was there for me," I insisted, with tears in my eyes. He gave me a huge hug and kiss, and grabbed Bling. As I was at the door about to leave, I turned around and looked. My dad was talking to Bling and crying. He squeezed him tight. I knew right then and there that Bling wasn't just for me, but also for the ones I loved. One year later, at six o'clock in the morning, we received horrible news from the nursing home. My dad had passed way. He passed less than two weeks away from my fourteenth birthday. We were all devastated. They told us we needed to come pick up his stuff. We rushed to the nursing home. I ran to my dad's room, he wasn't there. People from a local funeral home had already taken him. I was too late. I went to his bed and found Bling on his bedside table. I grabbed him quickly, jumped in the bed, and cried my eyes out. I thanked Bling for being there with my dad. When I squeezed Bling I could smell my dad's cologne. One of the nurses came in and informed me that my dad would sleep with Bling and would take him everywhere he went. When I heard that I stopped crying and couldn't help but smile. Bling was as loyal as a man's best friend.

Bling represents three of my life values. He represents my value of hope, gratitude, and love. Bling made me realize how much love my family had for me. How they went out of their way to get me something that we all hoped would help me conquer my fears. I appreciated what they did. I never felt such gratitude as I did in the moment I saw my parents filled with joy when they saw how I happy I was with Bling. I couldn't have asked for anything else.

If Bling could talk he would say, wherever you are on your journey, know that I will be there. Bling will be there for whoever is in need of him. The only person I would pass Bling to would be my nine year old niece. She's scared of a lot of things like I was and I feel Bling will help her. Maybe, just maybe, Bling will be passed on from generation to generation. Many people hold on to things from their childhood. I am one of them. I hold on to Bling because he awakens many memories with my dad and teaches me to be fearless.

Julio Santana
Basic Writing
Object essay
February 8, 2015

Boxing Gloves

The most valuable objects I possess are my boxing gloves because they bring me to when I was able to run seven miles in one hour. These gloves are special to me because every time I was going through some stress or anxiety, I took these gloves to the gym and started hitting the bag. It made my stress go away. It was like a one hour vacation from life. Boxing was more than a sport to me. It was my safe haven. It kept me out of trouble. Boxing was my getaway train from reality.

My gloves were red Everlast, and they weighed 16 ounces. The Everlast logo was red boxed in with a white background. The only annoying thing about the gloves was that I always had to ask someone to tie them for me. Luckily people in the gym were always happy to do so. The gloves smelled like sweat and dry blood. The blood on the gloves was mainly from my nose. When it was my sparring partner's blood, I always cleaned them, but the smell stayed on the gloves for some reason.

I got these gloves from my trainer after I wrecked my last pair from the abuse in the gym. What made these gloves so special was the light feel they had to them. It also felt like the gloves were accustomed to me. My knuckles were placed in the perfect spot inside the gloves. Instead of the gloves feeling like the actual 16 ounces, they felt like they weighed 10 ounces. And yes, 6 ounces makes a huge difference in boxing gloves.

I believe other people won't truly understand the appreciation I have for these gloves. They are a chance to go back in time and relive some memories that I will always carry. By closing my eyes and smelling the sweaty, bloody and spongy smell of those gloves, they take me on a journey to those memories that made me the fighter I am today. The memories I remember the most is sparring one of my closest friend, Jose Figueroa. It was one of the bloodiest and competitive sparring matches I've ever been in. I had a bloody nose and he had a bloody mouth. We still went at it like it didn't matter. I would be tired and still want more. He would be getting up from a knockdown and still fight like it never happened. But at the end of the session we treated each other like brothers and gave each other pointers for the next match. That to me is the beauty in boxing: whatever happens in the ring stays there.

I keep these gloves in a duffle bag I have in my room in New York, the same house I grew up in. My sister is the only one living there now with her boyfriend, but I don't have them because I have no use for them here. After my surgery, I can't box anymore. All the pounding and dislocations my shoulder took caused a socket fracture. I probably dislocated my shoulder 40 times during sparring sessions and hard workouts. The doctor had to cut off part of the coracoid and screw it into my socket. The pain was tremendous.

These gloves will always be a part of me no matter where they are. The memories are jammed in my brain like a nail in the wall. The gloves will always bring me back as long as I remember the sweaty, dry blood smell by closing my eyes.

Leidy Taveras
Basic Writing
Person Essay
Feb 12th 2015

My Mema

As of right now I have this sticky note on my mirror that states this amazing quote, "Surround yourself with people who are only going to lift you higher"- anonymous. I came across this quote my freshman year of high school and I've kept it near me ever since. I use it as a reminder to always keep positive people around me. But as you can imagine not everyone can influence you in a "good" way. As much as you try and stay away from them you always bump into one or two. However, when you do meet people who have a positive impact on you, they completely change your life. There was one person who tremendously changed mine. Her ability to overcome obstacles, her selflessness and her calm demeanor are why she influenced me to become a greater person in general and to always strive to succeed.

Picture her snow white hair picked up in a small neat bun, and her square framed black glasses, mid-way down her caramel smooth nose. She always has this tired look in her eyes, yet you will never catch her resting. On the contrary, she is always busy, either cooking, cleaning, or just tending to her many grandkids. It's not that she needs to be active. She refuses to sit and do nothing. It's probably because she has such a huge heart that she always wants to do things for you, to please you. Her loving way of being attracts anyone nearby making it impossible to dislike her. Her short stature doesn't limit her on doing big things. She always has a project in mind, whether it's going to senior centers to donate can foods, or simply going to her neighborhood church every week and volunteering with different activities. Whenever I see knit sweaters, I instantly think of her and her off white knit sweater with the blossomy smell of Downy. It's like she never takes it off. Apparently, she loves it. Oh! How can I forget her skirts? She doesn't like to wear pants so you will always catch her wearing long skirts that touch her ankles. Her simplicity is also admirable. She wears no makeup, no jewelry, and no "extra stuff" as she likes to call it. Although she is in her mid-50s, my mema refuses to think she's old. "Slow down, Mema," I remind her. "Listen girl, I don't have time to slow down." She replies with this calm demeanor. Reaching for and pulling her soft small chubby hands is sometimes the only way I can physically get her to slow down.

I admire how my mema has overcome so many obstacles. If there is a person who has gone through hell and back it has to be her. She is the youngest of 10 kids and lived in a poor neighborhood in Dominican Republic. She was forced to work at a young age and practically lost any chances of getting an education. There was just no time to. She refused to give up on her dream to study so that she can have a better future. Years went by and she finally picked up on a few classes that taught her how to sew. Finally, she was starting to better herself, starting a small business from her home selling handmade clothing. Later in life, she got married and started her own little family. She worked hard to give them a life that she didn't have. She made sure each and every kid went to school because she believed that was their only chance of having a bright future. She worked so hard on her kids and it sure did pay off. Two of them made it to the United States and not long after her and her husband (my grandfather) arrived to NY as well. She didn't stop working once she got here because she still had her other kids in the Dominican Republic. See this was a long story, but an amazing one. The way she fought every day for the children's

future and never gave up was fascinating. It's why I refuse to give up and always try my best at everything I do.

One of the best qualities my mema has is her selflessness. If it was up to her she would live giving up her time to those in need. For example, my mema loves to donate the clothes she no longer uses. Usually, she takes them to a women's shelter or the church she goes to. She is committed to the less fortunate. There was not one week that went by that she didn't do some type of community work; even when she was sick. On the days she had a cold or was sick for some reason she still refused to say no to whoever asked for her help. I remember this one time when she was feeling terrible. Even though she didn't tell me, I saw it in her eyes.

"Stay home today, Mema," I told her.

"Ok mi hija," she replied. She stood in bed till we got a phone call from my aunt.

"Mama, can you babysit the kids today. I have an appointment," my aunt asked my mema.

"Si, traelos" (Yes bring them). My mema didn't hesitate to say yes even though I knew all she wanted to do was lay down. I was so mad at her because I saw how tired she looked. But I also didn't take control and volunteer to babysit. That night she called me into her room.

"Leidy, tu nadamas piensas en ti, asi nunca seras feliz" (Leidy, you only worry about yourself. You will never be happy like that), she told me.

"Pero es que nose que lo hago,"(It is that I am not aware I do it) I answered.

"Mira, de vez en caundo olvidate de lo que no tienes, y en lo que si tienes. Asi podras pensar en lo que las otra personas no tienen. Y ya podras ayudarle a ellos conseguirlos,"(Look, forget about what you don't have and think about what you do have. That way you can realize what others need) she said.

"Ok mema, tratare,"(Ok mema, I'll try) I replied.

"Si mi hija, cualquiera cantidad de tiempo que tu puedas dedicarle a los menos fortunado, aslo. Son las cosas pequenas, como dandole tu asiento a una persona desacapasitada, cada acto de bondad te abrira el corazon y mente para ver que nesesita la persona a tu lado," (Any time I can dedicate to those who are less fortunate would mean a lot. The little acts of kindness like giving up your seat on the bus to a disabled person will open up your heart and mind to see other people's needs) she finished saying. She completely changed my way of thinking. From that day on, I watched her as she helped others and realized that living was much more than just surviving for myself. It's to give others an extra hand and help them survive along with me. Because of my mema, now I consider myself selfless like her. I love volunteering as much as I can. I just enjoy caring for others. I live to help others live.

Ever met someone whose calm demeanor makes you feel so at ease? I feel like that every time I'm with my mema. She has this way of being that makes you think she's an angel, so calm with any situation. "No te enojes tanto, eso te enfria el corazon." (Don't get so mad. It makes your heart cold) she would say once she saw my face turning tomato red. I was always very quick to get mad, but it was something about her calm presence that always cooled me down. Whether it was the stress getting to me, boy issues, friends issues, even family issues, my mema would sit down and listen to me with this calm and relaxed attitude. About a year ago, I received some terrible news that my youngest cousin was in an accident and passed away; I was so destroyed. As the family gathered I could tell everyone was very jumpy, very saddened and some of us didn't even know what to think and felt like giving up. But when my eyes turned to

my grandma, I felt a mood changer. Of course, she was sad, but she was calm. She knew he had gone to a better place. Her calmness just made me feel at ease with the situation. It inspires me because I want to be a teacher some day and I would love to be as calm as possible for whatever situation I have to deal with.

A selfless woman who can overcome any obstacle put in her way, all while having a calm demeanor describes my grandmother. She taught me to be a fighter and that giving up is the easy way out. She explained that being selfish isn't a smart way of living, that there are others who are less fortunate than me and if I can help I should. She showed me that being calm can get you passed mountains, and that on the other hand having a turbulent mind will get you nowhere. She influences me each day even more. All the qualities she has I am working on attaining because I believe I need each and every one of them to become a better person in this world. Maybe someday I can influence others the same way she influences me, and be the one of many to "lift you higher."

Kelly Harriman
Basic Writing
Person Essay
September 17, 2014

My Biggest Fan

There are times in your life when you need to realize how lucky you are to have that one important person there for you. Not only is she my mother, but also my best friend. My mother is the one who has raised me since day one and who has prepared me for the real world. My father plays an important role in my life, but it is my mother who has taught me everything I need to know. My mother is understanding, supportive, and crazy, and I choose these three qualities to describe her because these are what complete her and make her who she is.

My mom is 5'9" with shoulder length, dirty blonde hair and blue eyes. I guess you could say we look alike. Besides me, our home consists of her, her boyfriend, and our two Pomeranian dogs. Her job occupation is being a hairdresser at Sport Clips. When she goes to work, she has special clothes she has to wear. She wears a black t-shirt with her name tag on it, black Capri leggings or black yoga pants and black shoes. My mom likes to look good and smell good before she goes out, so she puts makeup on and a touch of perfume. For jewelry, she wears two rings, a watch and a necklace. My mom is that type of person that is bubbly and sweet to people. She is extremely ADD, so she tends to jump from topic to topic quickly. When you're having a conversation with her, you will never get bored. She is the type of mom that I can tell everything to and she will sit there and listen. We have that type of relationship where we can hang out in public. Some teenagers don't like hanging out with their parents or they are embarrassed to, but not me. I'm proud to be out with my mother whether it's shopping, going to the beach or even going to Zumba together. We go to Zumba twice a week. It's every Wednesday and Thursday we go and whenever we enter the room, the instructors and woman there think it's amazing how my mom and I do Zumba together.

The first quality of my mom is that she is an understanding person. When you're having a bad day, she is the one who makes you laugh and turn your bad day into good. She understands me more than anyone else in this world. No matter if I do something good, bad or foolish, she still loves and understands me. Just last night I went to the gas station after dance and I always have a habit of locking my car whenever I leave it, even if it's just five feet away. Well, this time, not only did I lock my car, but the keys were inside it! This has marked the second time I have done this. Thankfully, her boyfriend came to the rescue with an extra spare key that he got from her. When I had gotten home, I was expecting to get yelled at, but that wasn't the case. I walked in and she smiled at me and said not to worry. After all of that, it made me realize, not only do I need to get my act together, but the fact that I am lucky to have a mom like her. Many kids would get yelled at for such unintelligence, but I've learned that it's way different with my mom. The way she sees it is that people make mistakes and no one is perfect.

Since day one, my mother is my biggest supporter. Through dance recitals, getting my license, graduating high school, getting my first job and even making it to college, she is always there to support me through thick and strong. One day I was on my way to work and I had to stop at a yield sign. The woman in front of me seemed to be going, so when I looked, I saw no cars coming. I thought I was clear to go, so I pressed on the gas, but as soon as I turned my head back

around, I was hit in the back of her car. It wasn't major or anything like that, but I did hit her hard enough to take off her bumper. To make the situation even worse, the lady was 61 and she had a brand new red Ford Fusion. When all of this had happened, I was in a little bit of shock. I knew there would be times that I would get into car accidents, but I didn't think it would happen to me this soon and I wouldn't even expect to be hitting an elderly woman. I just remember sitting there crying and thinking of what to do. When I had the courage to step outside my car, the lady gave me a hug and said she was fine but once I got back in my car, I was shaking. I called my mom and although she was busy at work she took the time to talk me. She told me that car accidents are never fun but she has been through an experience like this before and when you have someone understanding by your side, it does help. She had calmed me down and by the time I knew it, I was already on my way to work feeling a little bit better. I was anxious and stressed out because I was already late for work, and the fact that I hit an elderly woman with a brand new car was all I had on my mind. In the end, though, it was my mother who was there with me the entire time, supporting me and having my back. I couldn't thank her enough.

Yeah, my mom is sweet and caring, but she does indeed have a crazy side that people may or may not know about. We will all be home and she will be making supper, but then there she is dancing to some Zumba moves while cooking dinner at the same time! You can always count on her to make your day better. There is always that one family member that is all around crazy and usually it's the children, but not with my family. My mother, my friend and I took a vacation trip to the Kancamagus. Normally the parents sit and watch their kids play and swim in the water, but with my mom, instead of watching us, she was in the water with us screaming and acting like a little kid at heart. My mom is the type of mother who will be crazy outside her own home. When it comes to my mom mowing the lawn, she likes to have headphones on so she can listen to her music on her phone. The problem is she is deaf, so she puts the music as loud as it will go and start singing intensely loud. Once you hear her singing, the neighbors come out on their back porch and see that it's just my mom doing her usual routine of mowing the lawn and they sit there and laugh. Meanwhile, here I am on my porch embarrassed with my face as red as a tomato. In all honesty, I must say I am proud of who my mother is. I would rather have a crazy, interesting mother than a boring one. I am actually lucky to have a mom like her. She not only brings out the happiness in our family, but the craziness as well.

My mother is my role model, my inspiration, and I look up to her. Our family wouldn't be what it is today without her. Her love not only warms our hearts, but brings us positivity. She is one of the most understanding people I know and because of her I have a different outlook on the world. I learn to understand life in a positive way and be grateful for what I have. She is my biggest support system and her support for me is out of this world. With her support, it makes me feel a little more confident with the things I do in my life and makes me want to keep moving forward. My mom couldn't have raised me any better. She rubbed off on me growing up, and now at the age of 18, if you ask me the reason I am so supportive it is because of her and how she has raised me. She has a different view on the world, and after seeing her view, it makes me so happy to be part of her and her positivity. She makes me think how to just look at all the positive things in life. My mother and her craziness is what complete our family. She is the person who has made me come out of my shell when I was a little kid and to stop being so shy. Because of her, I am more outgoing, talkative and a little bit crazy as well! What can I say. I learned from the

best! She is the reason I look at life in a different perspective and I am grateful for everything she does for us.

Kristi Southers
Basic Writing
Narrative Essay
February 18, 2015

This is a War and a Lot of us are A Part of It

I am a twenty-one year old female and I was addicted to opiates, specifically Percocet thirty milligrams. I started using opiates when I was about fifteen years old and wasn't really addicted until I was seventeen years old. I lost everything due to my drug addiction. I didn't think I had a problem. I thought I was perfectly fine and normal. I had big dreams just like every fifteen, seventeen, and twenty year old: becoming a famous celebrity, opening my own business, becoming a model, living in a big house, having lots of money, going to college and making something of myself, etc. I was a good girl before this black hole of addiction set in. I always went to school, I got great grades, I played sports, and I did what was always told of me without a question. If you asked me a couple years ago, "Do you see yourself being a drug addict when you're older?" I would have said, "FUCK NO!" For me snorting pills and getting high was like my own personal brand of medicine. It numbed me completely. When I was high I felt no pain whatsoever. I never felt anything. To be high was such an amazing and great feeling. To be in your own little world free of pain and stress was the greatest prize I could ever give myself at that point. You get taken away from reality and it puts your mind basically in a medically induced coma. It was feelings I loved way too much to just walk away from. Drug addiction is a nasty game that just takes and takes until it has sucked the life out of you until you have nothing left.

It all started when I was dating a guy who I was completely head over heels in love with. He was addicted to opiates. Even though at that time I did not like the drugs he would do, I loved him so much. I thought I would be the reason he would want to stop and get clean. Stupid me, I thought love would defeat all. That's how it worked, but later on I realized differently. I tried everything in my power to make him quit. Nothing worked day after day, hour after hour, minute after minute. Like that saying goes if you "can't beat em' join em." I thought if I would do the drugs with him that it would hurt him and he would see how much pain it causes seeing a loved one do those hurtful things to their body, mind and soul. It totally backfired. Doing opiates with him turned into a few times to doing it two to three times a day and that turned into four to five times a day. It kept me numb from all the pain it had caused me seeing him do it to himself and the thought of me now following in his footsteps. It ended up being all we would talk and think about. Our whole relationship had turned into one big pill. It revolved around when our next high would be and how we would get the money to get high. I let it control my life completely. I was doing one a day and that turned into two a day and two a day shortly turned into ten to fifteen a day. I prayed to die but yet continued breathing.

It was getting worse and worse for me month after month. I thought partying would solve all of my issues. This was the next step in my addiction. I was going out with friends almost every night smashing bottles of alcohol down. It would always block out my drug addiction and problems I had in my life for the time being. Alcohol turned into my distraction as well. I went from using ten to fifteen pills daily to adding a whole bottle of alcohol on top of all that. I would black out almost every night and have no idea what would be going on or happening. I would get taken advantage of by guys in the worst ways possible. I would act out and do crazy things that weren't like me. Examples of that would be stealing from stores to get

money to get high. I stole from friends that meant the world to me just to get high. I started spending so much money to the point I could have bought a house. I made the money I spent form selling drugs and stripping. I spent four hundred and fifty dollars a day ONLY on pills. Four hundred and fifty dollars times seven days a week is three thousand one hundred and fifty dollars a week. Three thousand one hundred and fifty dollars a week times a month is twelve thousand-six hundred –dollars a month. Times that by a year is one hundred and one thousand, two hundred dollars. That is a down payment on a house! Or in some cases a whole payment on a house. That does not include a bottle a night and a pack of butts a night. I started choosing drugs over food, showers, health products, and life. I weighed one thirty five before I had used. When I got bad into pills I weighed ninety pounds. It starved the life out of me and sucked me dry physically and mentally.

The moment that changed my life forever was the lowest I have ever gotten to. It was something I would never see myself EVER doing. I started dancing at a gentlemen's club in Massachusetts. I started stripping to support my drug addiction. Drugs were the only way I could deal with doing what I was doing which was my job. I would always get high during the whole time of being at the strip club. Before I went on, after I went on, and even during the dance floor. I would throw up at least ten times every hour at the disgust I had for myself that I had let myself become this person I never thought I would be. I was making close to five hundred dollars a night. The money I was making meant everything to me because that money was my drug money. I always found myself asking what happened to the big dreams I always had for myself? .How could I let myself get in with the wrong people? Why did I let drugs take over my life? Why did I start doing drugs to make someone I love stop doing them?

My mom ended up finding out about my drug addiction. She became so hurt, angry, and sorry for me. She always told me "Kristi, you are so brilliant and have so much to offer. You have the world in the palm of your hands." What really hit home for me is a conversation me and my mom had that I will never forget. My mom really made me feel loved and cared for when we had this conversation. She made me feel important and worthy.

"Kristi, you are such a beautiful young woman with so much to offer. You have the world in the palm of your hands. You can go anywhere in life, especially if you put your mind to it."

"Thank you mom, but it is so hard to just stop. I feel worthless," I said.

"Success isn't just handed to you; it's something you have to earn," she said.

The last sentence she had quoted from a book she had once read made me think. I need to get my shit together and start working hard to get to where I need to go in life. I will work hard to succeed and do anything that it takes to. If it wasn't for her being so supportive and being there for me I would have been dead. She was my biggest support system. She showed me why I had to turn my life around and change. It was a Thursday afternoon in the summer time. I remember it like it was yesterday. My mom had called me into the living room to talk. She then told me she was sending me to a really nice rehab in Florida. I was extremely nervous about going. I couldn't stop shaking and having the worst panic attacks I had ever experienced. It was so nerve-wracking but I knew I had to go. This was my opportunity to change my life around and stop having the opiates control my life. So I got on the plane and went to rehab in sunny Orlando, Florida. Rehab was the best thing I ever could have done. It was the toughest year of my life. The withdrawals I felt was like I was puking out the devil inside me. The cold sweats, poops, shakes, anxiety, muscle aches and pains, restless legs, insomnia, etc. To go through that took so much strength yet

it was mostly mental. I finally became free of my opiate addiction. I am two years clean today. I feel so much better about myself. I am finally healthy and weigh one thirty five again. I finally am getting my life back on track for the first time in such a long time. Drug addiction will probably be the hardest thing I will ever face in my life. Every day I have to say no. Going through this has made me stronger mentally and physically. I know I can conquer anything I put my mind to now. I will never go back to drugs. This is my life now and I'm taking control of it.

Yoko Yeaton
Basic Writing
Literacy Narrative
March 6, 2015

A Journey

Am I literate in English? I use two languages in my daily life. One is easier to use and the other is not that easy. Franklin Smith, a psycholinguist states, "One language sets you in the corridor for life. Two languages open every door along the way." What is the definition of literacy? According to C*ollins English Dictionary*: 1. Ability to read and write. 2. Ability to use language proficiently. To what extent is it the ability to use language proficiently? Reading and writing were always around me since I was a very young child, with my first language, Japanese. I grew up in Japan. I started learning English in 7th grade and I am still struggling with it. Those experiences, learning and using a second language, give me an opportunity to see things from many directions, open my mind wider and assure me the necessity of literacy. Literacy is a journey without end.

I started learning English in 7th grade. The textbook was not that big and thick, and there were many pictures. When I look back and compare it to the other subject's textbooks, I see that it stood out because it looked like a children's book. My vivid memories of those English classes were not about the language itself, but my teacher. She was from the southern tip of Japan. She came from that small mysterious island. The old cedars grew there. These cedars are more than 2500 years old. Some say those trees are more than 4000 years old possibly. I was wishing to hear more about her island than English itself. I remember I had a little struggle learning English. Even with that thin illustrated textbook, English was a very confusing language to me at first. In high school, the textbook got more textbook-like. It got thicker and had more text. Somehow, I started enjoying studying English. One reason was that I fell in love with the sound of British English. I don't think I met a book written in English that I can say I fell in love with at this time. I was doing a basic translation, not really reading the books. After graduating high school, I went to a junior college and studied English. The amount of reading increased - more than double. But my true English literacy training began after I moved to the United States.

I married my husband and moved to the U.S when I was 23 years old. I was blessed with three children. When they were young, I read many books to them, both in Japanese and in English. We received a picture book and a magazine once a month from Japan. My mother subscribed us to them as gifts. When the delivery date got closer, I anxiously opened up the mailbox. When I saw there were no books, it was a great disappointment. When I found the package, it was a highlight of the month. I yelped and danced. I didn't use the Internet then, so being able to read something in Japanese was a rare opportunity at that time. It was truly a heavenly moment. We got many English books from the library. I enjoyed reading countless picture books. The reading time was my children's bedtime. We snuggled in bed together, and I leaned against the wall while I read. Usually there was a little argument over who sat on my lap. Each of them brought books to me. We enjoyed wonderful series of books such as Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series, Ruth Gannett's *My Father's Dragon* series, and Tove Jansson's *Mooming* series. Although I am not a fluent reader, we had this story time together almost every day. Reading something enjoyable in English every day with my children was a joyous experience. When they were still young, I started working at the school where my children were

attending. I worked in the Early Childhood Department. I had to read some work related books. At the same time, I joined the study group, which read the philosophy books. Many of those books were arduous. I had a hard time understanding many of them. Reading doesn't necessarily provide understanding at the same time. Sometimes I felt I was illiterate.

I had a chance to read something fun, too. Once my friend, who had ESL teaching experience, said to me, "Yoko, if you want to speak English, you should read. I know it is hard to find time to read a book when your children are young. Then read whatever in your sight. Read, read and read."

"Read whatever is in my sight? Like advertisement and store signs and such?" I replied.

"Yes anything!" she said.

My children got older and I was able to find time to read during my break from work. I need to have an extra effort when I am reading something in English. So I try to choose something engaging. Many agree that it is easy to be hooked with Agatha Christie's books, even for people like me for whom English is not the first language. One of her stories, *Absent in the Spring,* was very entertaining. She used the name Mary Westmacott when she published this book. It was first published 1944 and it is not a mystery. I was surprised that she wrote this novel many years ago, but the content is not old and it could happen today. I admire talented people like her who can create such productions. I am not an active member, but I joined Goodreads, an online social media group. The technology we have now gives us extra fun and help. I can read many people's comments and possibly have discussions with them. Once I was reading a book, and I got completely lost. I had no idea what was going on in that book. I wondered if that is because of my limitation of English. I checked the Goodreads social network group to see what other people thought. There I found that even English speaking readers were having trouble understanding the book. I was not alone. That was a relief.

I feel that not being able to use English freely is like being handicapped here in the United States. I certainly can't use English like I do Japanese. The process of understanding a second language is quite interesting. I am able to use English to some degree, but I feel sometimes the process stops at the surface. When I read poems or sing with group of people, I wonder if I fully understand them. Where do those beautiful poems go and settle within me? To the same place as English speaking people? Does literacy means understanding things? If so, can I say I am literate? Or when and how will I know that I am fully literate.

To organize my thoughts, I have collected my views regarding literacy. Literacy is a privilege to humans, although not everyone has the opportunity to be literate. It is a pure joy which comes with some efforts. It is a survival skill. It is a bridge between people, thoughts and opportunities. And what does literacy do to me? It allows me to be independent. It opens up my mind. It allows me to view matters from many directions. It connects me to other worlds. Those are just some examples. Doing that in two languages gives me extra openings. I am in a middle of literacy journey, and that journey will last until my end. Life without literacy is unthinkable.

Leslie Rodriguez
Basic Writing
Media Essay
October 24, 2014

World Wide Web

"A journey of a thousand sites begins with a single click," said an Unknown Author. The Internet is just a click away and is used by everyone all around the world. It has become the most important form of media because people rely on it for work and to stay connected with who they need to stay in contact with. I started to use the Internet around the fifth grade when the teacher told us to print out a drawing we liked as a homework assignment. Ever since then, my mom bought a computer for the house and I used it to play games and for all sorts of things. To me it's important to have the Internet available at all times to help me with school work, keep connected with my family and friends, to learn about things that interest me, and to help me find a job.

The Internet helps me most with homework. All of my assignments are always posted on a website for the school. If I forgot to write it down in class, I can always count on Blackboard to remind me of what my assignments were. Even if I miss a day in class, the Internet allows me to go on online and be able to know what the assignments for the classes are. Not only does the Internet help me with figuring out what my homework is, but it also helps me figure out how to do an assignment. Not too long ago, I had to miss my math class because I had an appointment and wouldn't be back on time to attend it. I always know that the homework for the class would be online so I went to check it, but when I saw the problems I had to solve, I was confused because I hadn't heard of half the vocabulary mentioned in the assignment. I was able to Google how to do the math, and surprisingly passed the homework with only half of one answer wrong.

Next, I can rely on the Internet to keep me updated and connected with my family and friends. Most of my family lives here in Massachusetts, but about a fourth of them are still back in the Dominican Republic. I stay connected with them through Facebook and Instagram. I remember when my cousin was pregnant with her first baby. She lives in the Dominican Republic so our family wasn't able to be there for the birth of the baby or the baby shower. Connecting through Facebook and Skype was what allowed us to be able to see the baby after she was born, and as she grew, she familiarized herself with our faces. When we went to visit her in the summer, she had already known who most of us were because she had seen us on the Internet and treated us like if she had known us her whole life. I also have my close friends who are away at colleges. I don't see them very often so we connect through Instagram and Snapchat. Social networks as such on the Internet are what keep me close to my loved ones, even when we're miles away.

Furthermore, the reason why I am mostly on the Internet is to learn. I am always entertained looking and learning different things, whether I am on Netflix watching documentaries of the Holocaust, on Tumblr gaining knowledge of what's going on in the world, on Pinterest learning of ways to do different crafts, or on YouTube looking at Makeup channels and learning how to apply it. Every one of these websites has helped me keep busy and has also helped me obtain different hobbies. I've recently wanted to learn how to cook and because of Allrecipes.com, I have been able to visually see how I can make any dish. I always wanted to learn how to make my favorite, Chicken Alfredo pasta, and I have learned because of the Internet.

I know how to make about five dishes and whenever I get together with my family, I make one or two of them to serve on the table. It has helped me feel more a part of my family and has helped me stay entertained whenever I get bored.

Lastly, I have been on the Internet to look for jobs. All the jobs I have ever had have been because I found them on the Internet. There is this one website called snagajob.com where I made an account so they can tell me about what jobs are hiring near me. In that website was where I got hired for my first job at Best Buy. Unfortunately, it was only a seasonal position so I had to get back on the internet to look for another job. The website I had been on kept recommending the same jobs so I did a little more research for another website and found one called Indeed.com. This is the website where I found the job I am currently working at, JoAnn Fabrics and Crafts. In this website, you create a profile which is basically your resume. Every job I had applied to on this website had called me in for an interview. On top of this, the Internet saved me gas because I didn't have to go around asking places if they were hiring. With just one click, I had everything I needed to know.

People may look at the Internet as a bad source because of all the cyberbullying and all the bad things small children can be introduced to, but if you really think about it, it's not. Parents have the ability to block certain sites for their kids and the amount of cyberbullying that happens has decreased. The Internet is like a whole other planet with so many sources like sites to get a job, for entertainment, taking online classes, and even find work out videos. Most people can also change their addresses, track a shipment, and even shop without having to leave their house and wait in line for these sorts of things. I use the Internet on a daily basis for my daily needs and I highly doubt I can go a day or more without the Internet. It has helped me gain knowledge of so many things I never knew about.

Amanda Kaszuba
Basic Writing
Media Essay
March 30, 2015

Dance like No One Is Looking

I said, "Okay, stop talking."

She said, "Okay get ready to press record, it's coming up next, hold record and play."

I said, "Stop talking! It's coming on."

This is some of the dialogue that would accompany recording a single song from the radio. Waiting patiently for your most cherished tracks to play on the radio and having a cassette tape ready was a struggle as a teenager, not to mention you needed two radios to record one single. Making a mix tape, nowadays referred to as a playlist, took days to complete. On Sundays you could tune into Casey Kasem's American Top 40 to get the most popular songs with minimal talk, not exactly convenient but having a tape of all my beloved ditties was worth it. Back when I was growing up, getting a mix tape from an admirer meant you were going steady in adolescent code. Music is the universal language that speaks to all of us on some level. Music touches almost every area of my life. It provokes emotions and memories, whether I am singing at the top of my lungs or lip synching to one of my favorite tunes. Music allows us to walk down memory lane through the good times, past heartaches, appreciation, dedication and relaxation. When I listen to music it motivates me, entertains my mind, and encourages me to dance like no one is looking.

Motivating myself to endure the mundane tasks of everyday life is easily done with music in my ear. Music allows me to slip away from washing the floor and allows me to go poolside in Fort Myers. Playing music while I work makes everything go faster. Listening is an active process. Prior to any party or family gathering, the house must be cleaned from top to bottom.

I setup my iPad and play my carefully designed arrangement of fast paced, upbeat and extremely productive compositions. As I am singing the next line I do not give that stain on the counter any thought. It reminds me of the old saying, "whistle while you work," because it helps pass the time on any unenjoyable task.

Entertaining is an understatement. Although I am not gifted in this area, it does not stop me from belting songs out. I use music to ease my mind and revisit old familiar places. Music may not always be in the background but it is in the forefront of my daily living. Driving my car, sitting poolside in my own backyard, baking up a storm are just a few of the activities that are enhanced by a melody in the air. My taste in music varies greatly because of my wide influences. When I was about six years old my sister taught me a verse to a popular song, "These Eyes" by The Guess Who. She worked on this with me for days until I got it down. "These eyes, ohhhhh are crying, these eyes have seen a lot of love but they're never gonna see another woman like I had with you." My sister would parade me around for her friends to hear me sing it, not because of my talented tone but because I mastered a tricky verse to a catchy tune. My sister is seven years older than me and her taste in music definitely influenced the types of composition I enjoy. Fleetwood Mac and Steve Miller Band is the easy listening I still enjoy. Jingles and tunes have a way of attaching to my past and outlining my history. Listening brings me back to a simpler time that I enjoy visiting time and time again.

Music encourages, prompts, and tempts me to enter a world with no critics, just healthy silly competition in dance off form. Throwing caution to the wind while getting my boogie on with my two young daughters is my favorite influence music has on my life. Swinging my arms in the air and really belting it out, just to get a grin or a giggle is a scenario I find myself in often. I copy their moves and they copy mine and before you know it we are shaking our booty to Sublime. I grab a cooking spoon to ensure I do not sing out of tune and I pass the microphone to my daughter who proudly sings the second verse.

One of the songs I sing my two year old daughter is "Momma's gonna buy you a mockingbird" but what makes this funny is I could not remember the correct words so I made up our own version and this is how it goes.

"Momma's gonna buy you a mockingbird,
And if that mockingbird don't sing,
Momma's gonna buy you a diamond ring,
And if that diamond rind don't shine,
Momma's gonna buy you a clementine,
And if that clementine ain't sweet,
Momma's gonna wash your stinky feet"

Now we know this is not how the original lullaby goes, but in our house these are the lyrics. The notes could be coming from Pandora or "out of the mouths of babes" in this house of mine.

The presence of music in my life is paramount. It plays such a strong role in my everyday activities. Having music in daily situations will continue to motivate, entertain, and allow me to throw my hands in the air like I just don't care. Music can bring me to tears or down on my knees with laughter. Music has a powerful hold on my emotions and could be called the puppeteer of my soul. From a well-known philosopher Plato and these words ring true "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything." I believe I will always sing and dance even if only in my mind. Music can bring me up and help me calm down. The rhythm and beat ensure I remain on an even keel in the roller coaster we call life.

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Kristi Southers
Basic Writing
Purpose Essay
February 24, 2015

Thank You Rita

It only takes a split second to make someone's day. Sometimes those split seconds change lives. I figured all of this out just three years ago. I was working at Mount Carmel Rehabilitation & Nursing Center where I was an LNA. There was a specific client named Rita who would have me curl her hair every two weeks. I was surprised to see her that day because it was a week away from when she would normally get her hair done. I thought maybe she had a special engagement with her family, so I decided to ask her about her plans. "I don't have anything special going on," she told me. "I just want to feel good about myself for the day."

I then sat her down and proceeded to wash her hair and style it into little banana curls like a perm. She loved when I would do that for her. During our hour together, we talked, laughed, and joked around. We always acted like we had known each other our whole lives. She then had this huge glowing smile on and hugged me goodbye, so I could continue to help the other residents.

I had a week off of work for some vacation time, so it had been a week since I had last seen Rita at work. I went back after my time off and noticed Rita had checked herself out of the nursing home. I thought it was odd that she would just up and leave without saying anything to me because of how close she and I were. I went home that night and received a letter in the mail from Rita. I'll never forget what it said: "I wanted to get my hair done that day so that it would look good for my own funeral," she said. "I had planned to commit suicide that night. The wonderful time I had spent with you while you were doing my curls had given me hope that things could get better in my life, so I decided to check myself out of the nursing home and live my life to the best potential possible and get the help I need."

She thanked me over and over for caring about her and taking such good care of her day after day. She wrote, "Thank you for being there for me without knowing you were there for me." I was in complete shock. I didn't know what to think or what to do. I had spent so much time with Rita once every two weeks for two years, yet that day, I had no idea that she was in such a depression. I was beyond grateful and glad to have made such an impact in her life. This experience left me feeling like I had a huge responsibility to help people. What if I had been distracted, pissed, or hurried when she came to see me? It made me think of how many other people at the nursing home that I saw each day might be in a huge crisis in life. I have no idea who needed some extra attention.

After what happened with Rita, I felt like my calling was to give care and attention to everyone I see. I figured it would make each elderly person happy and make their days just a little better. Who knows, it could also possibly save a life like I had Rita's or at least make an impact on their life. It might sound like a lot of work to some people, but it isn't hard to pay attention, give someone company, listen to them, care for them and have fun with them.

I promised myself that I, from there on out, would pay attention and care for anyone I cross paths with. When I realized the difference I could make in one's life by doing the simplest things for others, my whole approach of life started to change. From then on out I knew what my calling was in life. I wanted to help others and care for others. I want to now work more in the

health field and become a full time nurse or doctor. Thanks to Rita, I now know what my purpose in life is and I honestly can't be any happier with my decisions.

Sylium Diaz
Basic Writing
"This I Believe" essay
November 12, 2014

I Believe in Cards

Honesty is at the core of a happy family. To have honesty means to practice it. Many families believe in Sunday night dinners together. Many also believe in watching sports together. I believe a family that plays cards together stays together.

From bringing out the game table to making snacks, playing cards has always been a part of my life. Our first game of cards was back when Hurricane Charley hit our hometown of Orlando, FL in 2004. We could hear the strong winds tunneling. Rain pummeled everywhere. There were power outages and trees fell in front of our very eyes. My sister was nine years old and I was eight. We were so scared that we started arguing. My dad yelled, "Girls to the table, now!" We ran to the table as fast as Speedy Gonzales. My sister and I sat at the table with our stuffed animals, waiting. My dad introduced us to the game. He called it the cards of truth. It was Go Fish and telling the truth put together. Before you could pick up or end your turn, you had to tell a truth.

It was my turn to say something. "You know I can't stand you right," I said staring at my sister smiling. She smiled back at me and said the same thing. We smiled because we knew we loved each other even though we got on each other's nerves.

My parents taught me that playing cards wasn't just a game. Whenever my sister and I would fight, my dad would make us get the game table from the basement. My dad would get the deck of cards. Mom would make snacks. Every time it was our turn, we had to say what we felt even if it hurt others. There were no repercussions, no grudges. Everything was left at the table.

Over the years, my parents' little game turned into a reality. One night, my dad didn't come home. My sister and I were worried. We were about twelve and thirteen years old. My mom was cleaning places she had already cleaned earlier. She started getting frustrated about everything. Mom stood at the kitchen counter for a minute then reached into the drawer for the cards. We quickly got out the table. After a couple of turns, my mom started to tear up. Without hesitating, she came right out and said it. My dad tried to commit suicide multiple times. He was in a mental institution. My heart broke. Months went by and I didn't want to play anymore.

My dad was finally released and he expected everything to be the way it was before. It wasn't. Whenever he wanted to play he would knock on my door. I wouldn't answer. He knew my silence meant no. With a lot of thinking in my room, I realized that I couldn't lose this game. My dad's suicide attempts were one truth I couldn't accept, but gradually, I learned to.

Playing cards wasn't the end for me - it was only the beginning. I came back to playing cards because whenever I closed my eyes, I could see my mom sitting next to me, my dad eyeing his cards then peeking at my sister, and my mom's Chex mix being thrown across the table, landing in my mouth and on the floor for my dog. I could see my sister with the worst poker face ever. I missed our game. I decided to accept what happened and moved on. A few days later, I was back at the table with my family playing our game.

I've learned a lot through playing our family game. It has helped me to be honest and to value family. Playing allowed me to be who I am and to say what I felt because those who didn't want honesty were the sort of people who didn't matter to me and the people who did matter to

me didn't mind me being honest. Searching for the truth is easy but accepting the truth is hard. In the end accepting truth brings a once broken family together.

In life, people say a family begins with love. Others say it begins with a home. I believe a family begins with a game of cards.

Patrick Keefe
WRT090
This I Believe Essay
October 22, 2014

Family Dinner

I believe in sharing family dinners together. My family had them when I was younger, and it made us a closer family. Family is very important to me because they are my first and closest friends. They are always there for me when I need them. Family is my blood and a bond that cannot be easily broken.

My mother is the person who taught me the importance of family and family dinners. For as long as I can remember, every Wednesday night, she would have a spaghetti dinner for the whole family. My seven siblings, their spouses and kids would be there, and even an aunt or uncle would show up now and then. Everyone would put their busy lives on hold for just one night each week to get together. I looked forward to Wednesday nights, not because of the meal, but because we would all be together again. The house would be filled with the aroma of garlic and tomato sauce. I could hear the children playing and the adults talking and laughing. Our house was always full of people enjoying each other's company. Every time my mother would announce, "Dinner is ready!" there would be a mad dash to the table to fill our plates. Somehow my Uncle Carl would get a head start every time. He would always have choice seating right in front of the bowl of meatballs, his favorite part of the meal. It was a while before we figured out that my mom was giving him a head's up before she made the announcement, giving him an edge. We thought these dinners were just that, dinners. Little did we realize it was family bonding. I grew up in a multigenerational family and as a result of these dinners there is no generation gap.

Family dinners do far more than simply supply food for the people at the table. Dr. Nadine Burke, Medical Director of the Bayview Child Health Center in San Francisco, CA, once said, "There's camaraderie and the family bonding that goes into sitting down and talking about your day over dinner in the evening." In other words, when you gather your family each night for dinner and discuss the day's events you are not just talking about your day but you are creating a strong family bond and camaraderie with everyone at the table. I am not sure if it was her intent, but this is the lesson that my mother taught me many years ago by simply serving dinner each night.

My mother passed 23 years ago, but I still host spaghetti dinners at my house for my extended family. I'll have them to celebrate birthdays, anniversaries or for no reason at all. Normally, there are about 22 people or more who come to fill my house and enjoy being with family. As usual most people come early to hang out and just talk and laugh. No one is turned away, even if there are not enough seats at the tables. There is always someplace to enjoy the meal and catch up with everyone. The house still smells like garlic and tomato sauce and is filled with laughter and the sounds of children playing, bringing me right back to my youth and those dinners in my parents' house. Even though it is a dinner, it's really not about the meal. It's about the people.

As my family grows and people move away, it becomes harder to get together. Schedules and other commitments prevent us from getting around a table to connect. As hard as we try, it just doesn't happen all the time or often enough. It is then that I realize how important those times

are together. Now that they are older, my kids may not be around every night for dinner but they will be there the next family dinner night to catch up. My kids are learning, just as I did years ago, the importance of family dinners and the bond they help create each time we sit around our dinner table.

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Tadisha Ledoux
Basic Writing
Reflection Essay
Fall 2014

Hard, Maybe Not

Being a bilingual student, I always thought I would not be that great of a writer. Things are not possible if you don't try. Going into Basic Writing in fall 2014, I thought that I would have trouble since it was college writing and I was just coming out of high school. With this mindset, I thought I would not be able to pass writing. Once I got into Basic Writing, things started to change for me. It is not about what you think; it is more about what you do. I thought to myself: *I can't do this. This is way too much.* I learned that essays go through a certain process, and it is not just writing an essay to get a grade. In Basic Writing, I learned that when composing an essay, you need to undergo a process of prewriting, revising and editing.

First, I learned about prewriting. Prewriting is a process to help you gain ideas for your essay. There are many different strategies that you can do for prewriting. For example, there's the drawing out the person when you wrote your person essay, or answering questions that relate to the essay. My favorite prewriting activity was answering questions that relate to the essay because when I finished, I took ideas from the questions and put them in my paper. For many writers, it is natural to know where to go with certain papers, but I like to have a little guidance to feel safe. When I am given a topic, I like to brainstorm helpful things that I can possibly put into my essay by just hearing the topic, but prewriting gives me a sense of direction and makes writing these essays easier to write.

Also, I learned that revising is very essential to writing essays in Basic Writing. After writing various essays this semester, I learned that revising is needed before handing them in for a grade. Most of the time, my papers were accepted, but my narrative essay was one of my best essays, which required me to go back and revise it for a final grade. Most of the time I would check for the basic structure of an essay, which is the introduction with a good thesis statement, body paragraphs with great details to support my thesis and a conclusion that closes the topic for my reader. As a writer, you have to make sure the person is very interested and not bored. Reasons that you would revise an essay are that everything flows and makes more sense to the reader.

Although every step in writing is important, I won't forget about editing my essays during Basic Writing. It was something I considered hard to do, but now I think I like it the best. The reason I like it the best is because it is much more about content, and that is what I would always focus on in every one of my essays. The reason for focusing on content and spelling is because it is what readers take from your essay, your story. You, as a writer, have to make sure everything is in its right order. As a person who knows another language, I get confused on some words, so I do pay attention to grammar errors like spelling and punctuation. Editing includes rereading your rough draft for mistakes and ways to change it to make better to read for someone other than yourself. As a writer, editing was the most essential step in writing my essays.

In Basic Writing, my most successful essay was my narrative essay, "Thank God I Met You." This essay inspired me to write about a special day: meeting my boyfriend of two years and bringing people to know why it meant so much to me. Most people wouldn't understand why I felt the way I did, and this essay explains my feelings and thoughts about meeting my boyfriend

of two years and my best friend. In my narrative essay, I stated "I told her nervously. How could someone so handsome be looking at me? I stood 4`11" and he was 6`1. He was wearing a red, black and white plaid button down shirt with some dark blue denim jeans." This helps the reader visualize the main character better than just as a boy. Although he is not in my life anymore, he still means the same to me. I put a lot of work into this because it was something I was passionate to write about. Many of the details I included were very important so everyone could picture it and also feel the way the characters did. One of my most difficult essays to write would have been my learning styles essay because I did not know how to go about it and there was no guidance through it. It was an on your own essay for me and this made it much more difficult. This essay made me learn a lot about myself as a writer and helped me grow into the writer I am today. Even though I did have some trouble during the semester with some of these essays, I did enjoy writing them and getting help from a tutor in the Writing Center.

This semester in Basic Writing helped me a lot and taught me many things about myself as a writer. I believe that it helped me gain a sense of confidence when writing some of my essays. I gained many skills and this is what helped me grow into the writer I am today. After Basic Writing, I do believe in myself and think I could write a lot better than what I did in high school. Day by day, this semester, I improved much more than I expected. Not only did it give me writing lessons, but also life lessons to apply to my future. For example, one life lesson would be to trust myself and give it all I have because it is worth all the effort you put into it. I write much better after this course and I'm glad I took it. It showed me the various steps a paper undergoes before receiving a grade like prewriting to gain ideas, revising to make my essay better, and editing to search for possible errors. Also, it taught me to write with a purpose. Instead of thinking of writing as a challenge, I see it as a blessing.

Damon Salmon
Basic Writing
Growing a Mindset Essay
April 1, 2015

Developing My Growth Mindset

In Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset,* she talks about the two different mindsets. She explains the differences between the growth and fixed mindset. Depending on what mindset someone has, it will change their views on life as well as their reactions to certain situations. I read about how these two mindsets can impact your learning ability. It changed how I view myself as a student as well as my life. I believe that I have the growth mindset. To really develop my growth mindset, I will learn from my mistakes, not shy away from negative feedback and improve my efforts.

When it comes to having the fixed mindset, people tend to avoid challenges at all costs fearing they will only fail anyways. They can ultimately view themselves as total opposites of people with the growth mindset. Unlike people having the growth mindset and always seeking ways to improve their skills, people with the fixed mindset will often fail to achieve their full potential. They tend to avoid challenges at all costs, fearing they will only fail anyways. That results in them not putting in their best efforts because they do not see the importance of putting in their efforts. Instead of turning negative feedback into positives, they just simply ignore it all together. People with the fixed mindset tend to be intimidated by people with the growth mindset due to their success. Everyone always sees that giving up is the easiest option, but it is people with the fixed mindset who actually follow through with doing so. In *Mindset,* Dweck talks about the fixed mindset saying, "In other words, they'd see what happened as a direct measure of their competence and worth" (8). Dweck basically explains that people with the fixed mindset feel that based on past failures in school or life that their future will only have the same result. I want to avoid having the fixed mindset at all costs.

To have the growth mindset really means that your intelligence always has room to grow as well as develop. There are certain ways that people with the growth mindset reach higher levels of intelligence. People who feel that they have the growth mindset will most likely be open when facing challenges. They will always put in their best effort in whatever they are doing. Also, they will not be afraid from setbacks and lastly they can always view negative feedback as a way to learn. When Dweck talks about people's qualities based on their mindsets in her book, *Mindset*, she states, "This growth mindset is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts" (7). What Dweck is explaining is that people with the growth mindset believe they can improve their learning abilities, communication and motor skills through how much effort they put into their work whether it is in school, work, or simply life. This is definitely the type of mindset I want to improve on.

In developing my growth mindset, I plan on learning from my mistakes. This I can apply to any situation in my life, inside and outside of school. I always try to turn negatives into positives because if I dwell too much on negatives, then I feel like everything else in my life will turn into a negative. In her book, *Mindset*, Dweck explains, "Even in the growth mindset, failure can be a painful experience. But it doesn't define you. It's a problem to be faced, dealt with, and learned from" (33). In other words, people should always fight through their problems and learn from them. It does not do anyone any good if they let their problem beat them as well as control them. From this strategy I can gain wisdom to help me become a better learner. It can allow me to

break things down and really think about each part deeply as well how I put things together including phrases, grammar, vocabulary, and just being very well rounded to produce the best product I can. I can use past situations to help me with future situations. At twenty years old, I have already lost my father and all of my grandparents. It has taught me a lot about how strong a family bond should be. Like a typical kid, I have gotten bad grades as well as in trouble in school, and I slowly learned I needed to smarten up if I wanted to have a future. Having gone through many tough times in my life, I know it is not over, so whenever I have to face another tough time, I will be well prepared on how to deal with it keeping a clear open mind and fighting through it.

I will also not shy away from negative feedback in order to develop my growth mindset. Going through middle school and high school if I received a bad grade I would normally think that this is only what I can produce. I got fed up with bad grades and applied myself more. Taking the negative feedback I would turn future pieces of work into positives. In *Mindset*, Dweck talks about how students received bad grades and negative feedback on their tests. She also talks about their reactions stating, "Those with the growth mindset, no big surprise, said they would study harder for the next test" (Dweck 35-36). In other words, students who failed or did not get the grade they wanted will only improve their efforts to do better next time, and that is what I will do with school whether it is homework, papers, presentations, or tests. For a long time throughout school if I received a bad grade I would not bother with trying to get a better grade next time. I thought this was all I amounted to until I found my passion and had a heart to heart conversation with my teacher. That's where I finally realized I needed to step up and do better for myself as well as my family. I feel like this will greatly improve how I can be a better learner because I can turn negatives into positives through my school work and then later in life apply to work.

Lastly, to develop my growth mindset, I plan improve my efforts. This will be applied more to school because the more I improve my efforts in school, it will come more naturally as well as more effortlessly. Then I know I can apply it to life after school as well as work without even realizing it. In *Mindset,* Dweck talks about students with both mindsets who have faced a hard test in class and did not do too well. Dweck states, "In the growth mindset, it's almost inconceivable to want something badly, to think you have a chance to achieve it, and then do nothing about it" (44). In other words, if people want something then they have to do something about it. People cannot just sit around and wait for a handout that may never come. I know that this strategy will help me become a better learner because growing up I have always known and tried to explain to others that if you do not like something or want something badly, then just do something about it because talking about it does not do it any good. It is my goal to become a scout in the National Football League and I know the job will not be handed to me. Anyone who really knows me, knows I want to be a scout but it is one thing to just say it. I have to prove to myself and others that I am capable of becoming a scout one day, so I am doing the necessary requirements to become a scout. I am working harder than ever to achieve my goal in and outside of school. It does not matter to me who believes in me and who does not because I believe in that actions speak louder than words.

These strategies have helped and will help me become a better learner because I now have the fundamentals, confidence, and tools to become a better learner. The more work I do as a student I feel like learning will become easier due to these strategies. My view of myself as a learner will greatly improve due to the fact I can know that whatever it is I am facing, I can apply myself better and try harder knowing if I fail I will only do ten times better next time. It is one

thing to talk about something, but it's another to back up my statements so I will feel more successful once I see success more often. Personally I feel that these are very good reasons to develop a growth mindset plan because anyone can do this. It just depends on what people do with it.

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Kenneth Stevenson
Basic Writing
Growing a Mindset Essay
April 9, 2015

Make it or Break it

In the seventh grade my English teacher said something to me that stuck with me for a very long time and made feel like a failure. She looked at me after handing me yet another poor writing grade and said to me, "If you were only like your sisters." This was true. Both of my siblings who were in her class had excellent writing skills and did very well in school. I was the complete opposite kind of student, who had difficulty in just about every subject and couldn't concentrate very well in class. That didn't necessarily mean that I couldn't become a better student. I just needed a little help to get me started, but my teacher had a fixed mindset. She believed that I should have been just as good of a student as my sisters. In result of her belief, I began to form my own views about myself and began having trouble staying motivated in school. In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck states, "The view you adopt for yourself profoundly affects the way you lead your life" (6). Because my former teacher believed intelligence was carved in stone she had no idea how to address the individuals who were struggling in her class. My teacher needed to develop a growth mindset and find a better way to get myself and others excited to learn. A mindset is just a belief, but it's a powerful one that can alter that path you take in achieving your goals. Having a growth mindset will increase your chances of being successful. To develop my growth mindset I plan to create a strong support system, visualize my success and try to understand that I am still learning.

Confronting a challenge and never backing down from the goals you set for yourself is the way someone with a growth mindset may think. The growth mindset values the inevitability that failure will occur during your lifetime, but through those failures, we can gain the knowledge to succeed. When you have a positive mindset, you have the power to take control of your learning and motivation. You believe that your natural abilities can be changed with effort. In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck states, "Becoming is better than being" (25). Professor Dweck homes in on the importance of continuously seeking improvement and getting excited for change that can happen in your life. If I would have kept my teacher's belief about my intelligence I would never be able to discover my true potential. When I develop a growth mindset, I might look at my failures and imperfections as tools to evolve the skills I need to be successful in school. I will able to confront the negative accusation and turn it into a positive outcome. Your intelligence, skills and mindset are not fixed. With hard work and dedication anything is achievable. Overall you are the deciding factor in your life story. Don't be satisfied with constancy and remember becoming is always better than being!

A person with a fixed mindset believes that their abilities and intelligence are unchangeable. In their mind, there is no problematic solution to becoming smarter. You are who you are and there's no changing that. Although you may think you're smart and able to comprehend material better than others, it doesn't necessarily mean it will always stay that way. Things will get harder and obstacles will appear during your road to success. You must always understand that your brain is like sponge and it can always soak up more information. Unfortunately, having the fixed mindset prohibits any thoughts of change and the possibility of

gaining more knowledge by applying yourself. In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck states, "You were smart or you weren't, and failure meant you weren't "(4). The fixed mindset sees failures as evidence of your intelligence. For instance, a child who is over praised for the excellent work they do in school may feel a sense of entitlement when it comes to their education. This mindset can affect the way he/she will view a challenging situation. They may fear the fact they could fail when things start to get challenging and if they did that meant they were stupid. The fixed mindset allows another person's judgment to affect your mood and behavior toward school, life, career choice, and family. It can stop you from wanting to try new things or cause you to lose interest in things you valued most. To a person who was thought to be naturally smart a bad grade can alter their personality and make them think negatively about themselves. Your mindset is fixed on what you already know about yourself rather than what you could possibly discover. They believe it is impossible to create the change they need to adapt to their environment. What we need now is a strategy to induce the growth mindset and develop a way to change our thinking process.

One way to foster the growth mindset is to create a strong and positive support system. In doing so, I will increase the chances of success by allowing the right group of people to influence the choices I make. Although everyone likes to be independent, it is near to impossible to complete everything on your own. You need help along the way. I believe by having a good support system I will mostly likely ask for help from those who have been through a similar situation as my own. They can provide constructive feedback on the areas I need to improve and help me accept personal responsibility. Another is considering others advice who have been down the path that I am about to embark on and develop better ways to overcome any obstacles they may have encountered. Although it's important to find positive people to surround yourself with, it's also imperative to strengthen the bond and communication you have with your family. They can have a very big impact on alleviating some stress that may hinder you from achieving your goal. Being a father of two boys and just returning from my third deployment creates a certain level of stress while I am in school. Communicating with my family members about what I'm going through in my life allows them to be involved. So in return they want to do whatever they can to assist my situation. Sometimes my mother will watch the boys while I complete an assignment and sometimes my brother will just come over to talk. Because I already trust my family, I able to talk about how I feel and that alone can relieve stress when there's someone just listening. It's critical to find the people in your support group that will challenge your thinking and are dedicated in helping you learn, grow and succeed in life. Therefore, your growth mindset will develop because of the people around you.

Another strategy is to envision where you've been and where you are to create the steps you need to recognize where you want to be. In order to develop a growth mind set, I need to visualize my success by building motivation. When I visualize my success I am able to find a way to stay on course and compose a plan to achieve my goal. It's not always easy seeing the successful part because you think more about the obstacle that stands in your way, but it's important to find a way to keep your eyes on the prize. For example, keeping a poster of my long term goals on my wall can help me see the light at the end of the tunnel. Even writing out some of the difficult things I have been through to show my transformation taking place will help me visualize my success. The key is to make my positive vision stronger than anything that can set me back. In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck states, "Think about your goals and think about

what you could do to stay on track to achieving it" (224). You must see yourself crossing the finish line to know that the possibilities starts and ends with you. Now try to visualize yourself at your college graduation holding your diploma and feel the tears of joy rushing down your face. I don't know about you, but that gets me excited to see the end result of my hard work. To know that all the late nights doing homework and staying after class to get extra help will eventually pay off. Visualizing your success is based on understanding that the road you start on is not a smoothed paved surface, but rather a rough dirt track. The truth is, if you can't picture yourself achieving a goal, chances are you won't.

One more strategy to cultivate the growth mindset is to understand that I am still learning and inventing a positive inner guide. To do so, I have to comprehend the fact that I can't dwell on my past experiences as a learner if I want to move forward in life. I have to halt any preconceived notion that my faults define who I am. Instead, I have to look at my failure as a reminder of where I was and let them fuel my determination to get me where I want to be. By improving my inner guide, I gain the necessary confidence I need to induce transformation. In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck states, "You can always substantially change how intelligent you are" (17). My abilities are no set in stone. With effort, they can be transformed. I have a choice in deciding the outcome of my future, and when I realize that success doesn't happen overnight, it will begin to mature my growth mindset. Life is one big classroom and no matter how much you think you know the possibilities are actually endless when it comes to learning. For this reason, it is imperative to understand that I am still learning in order to create a positive mindset.

Now that I have a growth mindset plan, I will implement these steps so I can become more successful as a learner. By following the strategies I created for myself, it's easier finding the motivation I need to stay the course. So often I worried about the judgment of others, but now there is a new found confidence in my abilities. This belief gets me excited to seek out new challenges and even rethink my career path to something I thought was too hard to accomplish. AS a student, I understand that learning is different for everyone. Creating a plan to develop the growth traits has shown me the best possible way to increase how I learn.

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Deandra DeRemer
Reading Writing Reasoning
Mindset/Stand and Deliver Essay
March 26, 2015

Bright Days Featuring Escalante

The movie *Stand and Deliver* is about Mr. Escalante, who teaches math in East LA at Garfield High School in one of the toughest Hispanic neighborhoods. He was passionate about making sure he taught his students more than they could've imagined. He saw potential in all his students; therefore, he never gave up on any of them, even if they didn't believe in themselves. He used countless teaching strategies to make sure his students learned basic math so they could move up to calculus so they could take the Advanced Placement exam. By him demonstrating these teaching strategies, numerous mindsets were displayed.

One teaching strategy Mr. Escalante used was connecting with students on a personal level. The way he connected with one student, Ana, and her parents. One night he and his wife went to eat at the Delgado family restaurant and he tried having a conversation with Ana's father about her. Mr. Escalante explained how Ana was a top student and how she could be the first to graduate and go to college. He wanted to change Ana's decision about dropping out of Garfield High and working for her father. Her father didn't care to hear what he was saying, even though he was speaking highly of her. The type of mindset this strategy depicts is a growth mindset. I think this strategy depicts a growth mindset because Mr. Escalante took time out of his day to connect with a student and her parents on a personal level. Even though her parents didn't care to listen at first, Ana then changed her mind about dropping out. She saw how much Mr. Escalante believed in her. In *Mindset*, Carol S. Dweck states, "Skill and achievement come through commitment and effort" (179). Mr. Escalante wanted nothing more than to see his students achieve and go forward in their lives.

The second teaching strategy Mr. Escalante used was making it real (via real life scenarios.) The way Mr. Escalante incorporated this strategy into his teaching was when he was teaching algebra to the class. On the blackboard, there were workings for the factorization of polynomials. He then asked one of the students to read from the board and they all read what was written. Then he asked one of the students how many girlfriends Juan had based on what he had written on the board. They all started to get an understanding of factorization of polynomials because he used names for X, Y, and girlfriends for numbers. The type of mindset this strategy depicts is growth mindset. I think this strategy depicts a growth mindset because Mr. Escalante made learning a hard math topic into something fun and interesting that his students would be able to understand better. It was easier for them to understand it because he made what he was teaching real. In *Mindset*, Carol S. Dweck states, "I'm going to teach you," not "I'm going to judge your talent" (197). Mr. Escalante's teaching strategies show that he only wanted the students to learn more than what they knew. He taught the students to the best of his ability and he did it without judgment. By incorporating real life scenarios into his teaching strategies, the students were less distracted about being judged because it was something they all understood, so did Mr. Escalante.

Another teaching strategy Mr. Escalante used was to restructure the physical location of students. The way he demonstrated this strategy was when he was teaching the students math in

the locker room during a hot summer day. The students were not pleased with being there. He was standing at the front of the locker room and the students were sitting on the benches. It was hot and they were uncomfortable, Mr. Escalante brought in oranges to eat while he taught them. Moving the students to another location made them get more involved. The type of mindset this strategy depicts is a growth mindset. I think this strategy depicts a growth mindset because he got the students to participate in a different setting. No matter where they were, they always learned actively. In *Mindset*, Carol S. Dweck states, "We're proud that you've stuck to it and kept learning" (180). The students thought the room was supposed to be air-conditioned and he told them to think "cool." They all repeated, "cool" and got back to working. They stuck through an uncomfortable time and that's all he wanted them to do that day--not give up.

On the other hand, Mr. Escalante didn't always use growth mindset strategies. There were a few times where he would make inappropriate comments to and about the students, in particular, Claudia. Claudia always put her older boyfriend first; she would leave class and ditch her friends for her boyfriend. One day the students had to stay later for class and Mr. Escalante said jokingly they could order food and that they didn't deserve the grades they were getting. Claudia got up from her chair and left class. Mr. Escalante then said, "Where are you going? Late for another date? She's got more boyfriends than Elizabeth Taylor."

Claudia replied, "I don't appreciate you using my personal life to entertain this class." The type of mindset his action(s) depicts is a fixed mindset. I think this depicts a fixed mindset because he didn't care about hurting her feelings. He wanted the other students to laugh and consider him funny. In *Mindset*, Carol S. Dweck states, "Others may look up to them and judge them to be cool, powerful, or funny" (116). Mr. Escalante didn't do the right thing at the time by talking about one of his students he wanted to help. He made Claudia feel bad about herself and the other students witnessed his poor actions.

The movie, *Stand and Deliver* affected me in different ways. The first way it has affected me is that I got to see a teacher genuinely love and care about his students and it made me realize that there are teachers who want us to be successful in our lives. In addition, there are always people rooting for us, even when we're not. The second way it has affected me is that I always give my best all the time because I will always get further that way, and if I don't believe in myself I'll make my growing process harder than it is. Furthermore, it has made me more aware that not everyone's home life is perfect and we all go through good and bad times, but we shouldn't let that stop us from our goals.

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Madison Brasier
Basic Writing
Mindset/Stand and Deliver Essay
November 15, 2014

Anything Can Be Achieved

Would you even try in school if everyone in the class, including you, had no potential whatsoever? This was the case for students at Garfield High School (GHS). No one believed in the students; therefore, none of them tried to pass. That is until Jaime Escalante came into their lives. After learning more about Escalante and his growth mindset, it is important for students to be aware that nothing is impossible if they have the right mindset.

The teacher in the movie *Stand and Deliver*, Jaime Escalante teaches with a growth mindset by not giving up on the students. No one was on his side. Even the other teachers and head of the math department doubted him. In Carol Dweck's book, *Mindset*, she described two ways of thinking, the growth and fixed mindsets. People with a growth mindset are not afraid to try new things. They are very open minded. Failure is their number one motivator. On the other hand, people with a fixed mindset are very stubborn in their ways. They are afraid to fail, so they don't try. These people are very closed minded. Escalante's' teaching demonstrates a growth mindset. He teaches in his free time, even when he didn't have to. He never gave up on his students, even though the other teachers had doubts toward them. His growth mindset pushed his students to improve and achieve great things.

First of all, Jaime Escalante makes it a point to set high expectations for his students, even when others doubted them. For example, in the movie, he wants to skip all of the basic math in between and go from algebra to calculus. He launches his idea to the teachers in the school. At first they think he's crazy. Then most of the teachers agree, except the head of the math department, who says that the students are illiterate and can't do it. He goes for it anyway. In her book, *Mindset*, Carol Dweck writes, "Is everyone capable of great things with the right mindset? Could you march into the worst high school in your state and teach the student college calculus? If you could, then one thing would be clear: With the right mindset and the right teaching, people are capable of a lot more than we think" (63-64). Dweck is asking if every person can do something amazing when in the right state of mind. Is it possible to go to the most horrible high school and have the students understand advanced math? If the teacher has the right mindset, students can achieve more than they think. Teachers with fixed mindsets don't think their students should be challenged. That way, they don't fail a hard class. They will succeed with an easy class. Escalante had a growth mindset, so he didn't stop at algebra. He went straight to calculus and succeeded. Life is about risks. Jaime Escalante had faith in all his students. He pushed them extremely hard, and set high expectations, and they all passed.

Not only did Escalante set high goals for his students, he also helped his students understand that changing isn't a bad thing. What a person chooses to do throughout his/her life should always be to better his/her future. Poncho's head was set on going to work on cars instead of going to school, but Escalante changed his mindset. Jaime Escalante told Poncho, "You only know the turn, not the path ahead." Poncho was going to quit school and just work for his uncle to make money. Escalante convinced him to stay in school because it would be more beneficial in the future. He wanted to change all of his students' minds. In the book, it says, "Change can be

tough, but I've never heard anyone say it wasn't worth it" (Dweck 246). In other words, change can be difficult but no one has ever said it was a bad thing. Poncho definitely didn't regret staying in school after he passed the advanced placement test along with the rest of the class. All their hard work paid off. Even though something may seem like a better choice now, it's best to think ahead and see if it will help in the future.

Finally, Jaime Escalante believed in his students. He never gave up on them. These students tried their hardest to make their teacher proud. For the two years they were in the class, they were able to learn Algebra and Calculus. They stayed longer hours in school, came on weekends, and even went to school on holidays to achieve their goals. Before Escalante came into their lives, they slacked in school and didn't try. In *Mindset,* Dweck writes, "You can always substantially change how intelligent you are." (17). In other words, it's possible to become more intelligent. Jaime Escalante's students proved this theory true. Before Escalante was their teacher, they didn't listen or do their work. The other teachers couldn't control these students. He came to teach the class, and he had the right mindset to change their perspective on learning.

It's hard to imagine how the students at Garfield High School would have been if Escalante wasn't there to teach them. He used his growth mindset and also taught his students how to have a growth mindset. The students became more open-minded once they learned in his class. They realized that nothing is impossible, even when no one was on their side. With a growth mindset, anything can be achieved.

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Nina Harrington
Opinion Essay
Basic Writing
April 30, 2015

Tuition Free Community College

Community college already saves people a lot of money. What if people could save even more money? President Barack Obama is proposing a plan to make community college tuition free for all students. President Obama's plan requires students to be in school full or part time. They must also maintain a 2.5 grade point average (GPA) and make progress toward completing a program. This plan would only make the first two years of community college tuition free. This proposed plan is very controversial. On the one hand, some people believe that community college should not be tuition free because it would be too much money to invest in. On the other hand, others argue that community college should be tuition free for all students because it would help many people out financially. This program would make the college experience and opportunity available to everyone. After learning more about this issue, I believe that community college should be tuition free for all students.

Community college should be tuition free because not as many students will go into debt. So many people in debt are students because they take out lots of student loans to pay for college. They also have to pay huge interest rates so they are paying more money than expected. In his article, "I Owe It All to Community College," Tom Hanks writes, "High school graduates without the finances for a higher education can postpone taking on big loans" (Hanks). Hanks is saying that if community college was tuition free, many students won't have to take out big student loans until they transfer to a four-year school to continue their education. They also won't have to take out as many loans in general, which means they won't have to pay as much money in the end. Many students could benefit and save money with tuition free community college.

Community college should be tuition free because it would provide everyone with an equal opportunity to attend college. There are many people who don't go to college because they can't afford to. If community college was tuition free, then people who wouldn't normally go to college could get a chance to. In her article, "Obama Plan Would Help Many Go To Community College Free," Julia Hirschfeld writes, "The program has gone a long way toward making community college attainable for all students" (Hirschfeld & Lewin). Hirschfeld is saying that this program is trying to help every student go to community college. Money gets in the way of letting students attend college. With this program, money wouldn't be as much as an issue, which means that more people could attend.

We should adopt the plan for tuition free community college because potentially more people would be graduating from college. More opportunities would lead to more qualified people to work in certain fields. The unemployment rate is still high. With tuition free community college, more people would have an opportunity to attend college and hopefully graduate with a degree. If we give more citizens a chance to obtain a college education, it is very likely that they will have better employment choices. President Obama said that this program is something that we, as a country, can achieve and this program will help build up our workforce so we can be more involved in the work industry (Hirschfeld & Lewin). President Obama implies that the plan

can be accomplished, and it will help more people get jobs so we as a country can compete with other countries.

Of course, skeptics may disagree on grounds that money isn't the only barrier keeping people out of college. Many students may have other problems to worry about than paying for college. Some people have jobs. Other people have kids to look out for. Most people have bills to pay and not enough time in the day to get everything done. Many people prioritize their life based on their needs. Usually paying the bills and family is high on the list, while attending school is low. In his article, "Skeptics Question the Cost of Free College," Alex Friedrich writes, "They [skeptics] also note that money isn't the only barrier low-income students face pursuing a degree" (Friedrich). Friedrich is saying that there are other reasons people don't or can't go to college besides money. Circumstances happen and come up that are beyond our control. Making community college tuition free won't get rid of or fix all of the other problems or challenges people face every day. However, this objection is flawed because it even though money isn't the only problem students are facing, free tuition would still help them save money. Paying for school would be one less thing students have to think about. Think of the things they are missing out on. Getting a higher education, especially a good one, can lead to better job opportunities which would lead to more money to have. More money would lead to a better life and lifestyle. They would have more money to pay bills and/or take care of children and improve the quality of life.

The issue of should community college be tuition free for all students is important to anyone who cares about education and the future. The type of program President Obama is proposing may be expensive and people will have to pay, but times are changing. Most decent jobs nowadays require some sort of college degree. If community college was tuition free, it would take some of the financial burden off students so they can focus more on school and getting the job they want and deserve. Everyone would have a chance to go which would help put more people in the workforce two to five years down the road. The next generation of people will definitely benefit if we put this program into effect. A good education can enlighten people to many things they would not have had the ability to know or experience. When we are older, the next generation will carrying on in the world. We need to prepare them as best as we can and give them as many opportunities to succeed in life as we can.

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Basic Writing
Opinion Essay
April 21, 2015

Buying Products Overseas

In recent discussions of products being made in sweatshops overseas, a controversial issue has been whether it is ethical for Americans to buy these products. On the one hand some argue that it is ethical because they feel it is helping poor countries' economies. On the other hand, others argue that it is not ethical because they feel that the workers in these countries are not being treated right. In my opinion, I feel that it is not ethical for Americans to buy products that are made in sweatshops overseas.

One reason it is not ethical for Americans to buy products made overseas is that most sweatshops have dangerous work conditions. In these working conditions, workers may be exposed to deadly toxins that could injure or kill the workers, or even worse, create chemical explosions harming the worker inside as well as neighboring buildings. In their article, "In China, Human Costs Are Built Into an IPad" Charles Duhigg and David Baroboza write, "Two years ago 137 workers at an Apple supplier in eastern China were injured after they were ordered to use a poisonous chemical to clean iPhone screens. Within seven months last year, two explosions at iPad factories including Chengdu, killed four people and injured 77" (Duhigg and Barboza). Duhigg and Barboza's point is that workers have to work with chemicals that can be fatal and could cause explosions such as the ones mentioned in their article. Things are not too safe for workers and it only gets worse.

In addition to dangerous work conditions, sweatshop workers are not always being treated the right way. It is bad enough workers lives are put at risk in these sweatshops with chemicals and explosions but at the same time workers are not always getting the respect they deserve. Some workers have long hard shifts and have very low wages as well as very poor living conditions outside of these factories. In the article, "In China, Human Costs are Built Into an iPad" by Charles Duhigg and David Barboza, they state, "Employees work excessive overtime, in some cases seven days a week, and live in dorms. Some say they stand so long that their legs swell until they can hardly walk" (Duhigg and Barboza). In other words, workers can work for multiple weeks straight while making very low pay. Once they are allowed to go home at the end of the day to rest their aching bodies, they have to share a small dorm with up to several other people. Some can assume that companies like Apple are aware of these situations and fix them but in most cases Apple avoids getting involved.

On top of these reasons, companies like Apple show very little knowledge of what is going or have demonstrated a lack of involvement. Workers at Wintek a factory in China and Apple's partner, went on strike over issues with being exposed to toxins. There was an investigation that revealed that, "over a hundred employees had been injured by n-hexane, a toxic chemical that can cause nerve damage and paralysis" (Duhigg and Barboza). The toxin n-hexane was used to clean iPhone screens due to its ability to evaporate quicker resulting in workers being able to clean more screens at a faster pace. It was not until a year later that Apple released a statement about the injuries suffered in their partner's factory. In their supplier responsibility

report they talked about how they required Wintek to stop using that toxin as well as saying that the workers who were affected had all been treated and they keep a close eye on them. A few weeks later, a reporter for *The New York Times* interviewed multiple workers and they said, "They had never been contacted by Apple or its intermediaries" (Duhigg and Barboza). Later in the article the writers goes on to say "Wintek had pressured them to resign and take cash settlements that would absolve the company of liability" (Duhigg and Barboza). To sum it up, it seems that Apple as well as their partners could be lying about what happened so they can save themselves but then workers went on strike in order to let the truth out. Who knows how many times this has happened.

There are not always bad sides to sweatshops overseas. On the other hand, I agree with people who say sweatshops can be safer than struggling on the streets. But, I still insist that sweatshops are not safer because in order to try this theory, people are putting too many lives at risk. I am not alone on this belief, in the article, "Two Cheers for Sweatshops" by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, they interviewed a man named Mongkol Latlakorn whose daughter works in a factory and he said, "It's dangerous work, twice the needles went right through her hand" (qtd. In Kristof and Wudunn). In other words Latlakorn is explaining how dangerous it is to work in these factories and how his own daughter has been injured on more than one occasion. I am not saying people are better off on the streets but there is too much at stake to risk the lives of others to possibly better their lives.

Ultimately, what is at stake here is thousands of people's lives so Americans can have high tech technology. It does not seem necessary for people to die in explosions or using deadly chemicals to make a phone or some high tech product available to us Americans. Even though these workers are not related to us and how it is easy to not care, we need to take into consideration their families and how they put their lives at risk to provide for their families. It does not seem worth taking someone's parent or relative away from them just so spoiled kids can compare their products at school or so business men can conduct business sometimes illegally. I am not against the use of technology, I am against the process in which they are made. So next time a new Apple product comes out, ask yourself: Is it worth risking lives so you can have a new iPhone or iPad?

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April 30, 2015

Supporting Overseas Sweatshops

In recent discussions of overseas sweatshops, a controversial issue has been whether or not it is ethical for Americans to buy products that are made in those sweatshops. On the one hand, some argue that it is not ethical because they feel that the sweatshops are exploiting the workers they employ. On the other hand, others argue that it is ethical because they feel that the sweatshops are actually helping people and the economies. In my opinion, I feel that it is ethical for Americans to buy products from overseas sweatshops. The reasons why I support sweatshops is because they are providing a safer alternative to people who are living and working in poverty-stricken areas, they are producing jobs that are helping people get out of poverty, and they are helping poor countries in Asia increase their economies.

One reason I support buying products from overseas sweatshops is because they are producing jobs that are helping people get out of poverty. There is such a high demand for many products that Americans buy, which in turn is opening up a lot of job opportunities for people in these poor countries. China alone employs over a million factory workers, and the factories there fabricate close to 40% of the electronics sold worldwide (Duhigg & Barboza). In his article, "Where Sweatshops Are a Dream", Nicholas D. Kristof writes, "Talk to these families in the dump, and a job in a sweatshop is a cherished dream, an escalator out of poverty, the kind of gauzy if probably unrealistic ambition that parents everywhere often have for their children." He later argues, "The best way to help people in the poorest countries isn't to campaign against sweatshops but to promote manufacturing there" (Kristof). Kristof's point is that if we stopped buying products from these sweatshops, there would be less of a demand for those products and millions of jobs would be lost. With these sweatshop jobs, many people are able to afford basic necessities such as mosquito nets, to protect them and their children from malaria.

In addition to providing jobs, sweatshops are providing a safer alternative to people who are living and working in poverty-stricken areas. Many of these impoverished people live in deplorable conditions where the air and water are toxic. Some of the people actually live and work in the dumps, where they have to worry about their children being run over by garbage trucks. Others live in disease-infested areas and fret catching deadly malaria. When referring to a woman, Vath Sam Oeun, and her 10-year-old son who both scavenge in the dumps for items to sell, Kristof writes, "Her boy has never been to a doctor or a dentist, and last bathed when he was 2, so a sweatshop job by comparison would be far more pleasant and less dangerous" (Kristof). He also refers to a 13-year-old girl, Neuo Chanthou, "who earns a bit less than $1 a day scavenging in the dump" (Kristof). She says, "It's dirty, hot and smelly here" and adds that "A factory is better" (qtd Kristof). In other words, sweatshop factories are giving people the opportunity to work and live in better conditions than they presently endure.

The most compelling reason that I support sweatshops is because they are helping poor countries in Asia increase their economies. The factories have played a major role in Asia's increase of wealth. In their article, "Two Cheers for Sweatshops," Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl

WuDunn write, "The sweatshops have helped lay the groundwork for a historic economic realignment that is putting Asia back on its feet. Countries are rebounding from the economic crisis of 1997-98 and the sweatshops – seen by Westerners as evidence of moribund economies – actually reflect an industrial revolution that is raising living standards in the East." In making this comment, Kristof and WuDunn believe that these countries' economies would not have progressed as much, had they not had the sweatshops to help them. With stronger economies, wages are able to increase and factory workers are able to attend school. Certain countries now have a form of private housing available and somewhat of a middle class has emerged (Kristof & WuDunn).

Some may challenge my view by insisting that sweatshops are inhumane and dangerous. Many people say that sweatshop employees are being exploited by having to work such long hours with very little pay. They may argue that the sweatshops are dangerous because of the chemicals the workers are exposed to. I can understand why some Americans are against buying products from these sweatshops, because of the conditions some of the workers undergo. Kristof writes, "I'm glad that many Americans are repulsed by the idea of importing products made by barely paid, barely legal workers in dangerous factories. Yet sweatshops are only a symptom of poverty, not a cause, and banning them closes off one route out of poverty" (Kristof). I still insist that not buying products from these sweatshops will actually hurt the people in Asia, not help them. Millions of people would lose their jobs, which means they would have to go back to living and working in the wretched conditions they came from.

This issue is important for anyone who cares about ending poverty in overseas countries. The factory workers overseas are trying to make a better life for themselves and their families, just as we do here in America. If American shoppers truly want to help the people working in overseas sweatshops, they should continue to buy the products manufactured in those factories. By doing so, it could give millions of people the chance to rise above the poverty threshold, job opportunities with safer environments, and the possibility for economies to progress even more than they already have. The next time Americans go shopping for a new phone or even a less expensive outfit, they should remember that they could be saving someone's job and helping another family out of poverty.

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Research Essay
May 4, 2015

Examining Obesity: America's Health Crisis

In the decade between 1990 and 2001, *The New York Times* published 750 articles pertaining to obesity (Boero). During the same span of time, nationwide obesity rates swelled by 74% (Ward-Smith). Since then, more than another decade has come and gone, and obesity's presence in American society has only increased. The CDC reports that today, more than one third of American adults, or 34.9%, are not just overweight, but obese ("Adult"). However, there is a likelihood that this is an underestimate, as it is based on the self-reported height and weight of individuals. These rates have showed no sign of slowing down or decreasing – they have only continued to increase year after year. It is sad to say that America's rapidly growing obesity rate is the nation's largest present health threat, and a costly one at that. With multiple social, economic, and personal contributing factors, obesity may seem unstoppable. In particular, the future generation is at great risk, as they are brought up in an environment tolerant of obesity and the habits behind it. Fortunately, progress is being made to reverse this growing trend with a variety of potential solutions on both individual and community levels.

With the rise of technology, America has become a much more sedentary and indoor society. Though many may feel as though they get ample exercise, the amount who genuinely do make up a mere 5% of the population, with the average American spending 55% of their waking life sitting down. In the past, leisure time may have been spent outdoors or playing sports, but screen time and media have dominated most modern households, turning their occupants into couch potatoes who absorb an average of five hours of TV per day ("Obesity 2012"). Children are especially prone to inactivity, preferring to spend their time glued in front of game consoles, phones, and computers.

Over the past fifty years, the amount of bodily movement involved in American workplaces has been rapidly declining. As of 2010, less than 20% of employment entailed what is considered to be moderate physical activity. More and more, people are forced to spend their careers seated in cubicles rather than on their feet, on average burning 142 calories less per day than in the past ("Obesity 2012"). Though this may seem like an insignificant amount, over weeks, months, and years, these handfuls of extra calories add up and transform into stubborn fat. The way in which excess weight tends to creep on may prevent individuals from noticing that they may be growing in the first place, leaving them with no desire to alter their unhealthy habits.

In modern society, Americans are increasingly turning away from wholesome home cooked meals, preferring the convenience of store bought or fast food. At the same time, the portions served by fast food establishments have dramatically increased. Soda intake in particular has risen, with the average American guzzling 52 gallons per year. Easily adding hundreds of sugary liquid calories to their daily diet, many may not recognize the beverages they choose are meant to be consumed in small amounts. At the same time, the media has been pushing fast food advertisements in hopes of capitalizing on this trend. Of course, much of this material is aimed at impressionable children, preying on their natural cravings for sweets and junk food ("Obesity

2006"). Eric Schlosser, author of *Fast Food Nation*, believes that chemical additives alter children's tastes, making them more likely to eat highly processed food which would otherwise be unpalatable. This is reinforced with targeted advertisement, by which "...kids are bombarded every day, everywhere. He claims that fast food companies are targeting the poor in particular, with value meals bringing in high profits (Schlosser).

Despite the fact that Americans are gaining weight, many health professionals are concerned about whether or not they're receiving adequate nutrition. For those with less money, finding nutritious yet affordable food often presents a challenge. Rural advocate Debra Kozikowski believes that, "There is no ailment that cannot be made worse by poor nutrition, and few that cannot be made better by its opposite." This is certainly true in the case of obesity. Though the poor and overweight may eat inconsistently, a lack of healthy yet affordable food forces them to turn to cheap and calorie laden meals, especially fast food. While they may be filling their stomachs, they're not properly able to fuel their minds or bodies. At the same time, poverty and hunger rates are on the rise, and food banks are struggling to continue meeting the demand of those in need (Kozikowski).

While Americans are moving less, they are also eating more. In a 30 year study between 1977 and 2006, researchers found that additional calories in the American diet tended to come from growing portion sizes. Warnings against 'supersizing' were issued, and by the mid 1990's average portion sizes had slightly decreased. However, during the latter half of the study something new came to light. Though they had begun to choose slightly smaller meal portions, over the 30 year span Americans began eating more frequently throughout the day, going from consuming food 3.8 to 4.9 times per day ("Obesity 2012"). Today, it seems as though many are still confused as to what constitutes a standardized serving size, usually under estimating the amount they're actually consuming. At the same time, Americans feel a compulsion to clear their plates no matter how heaping they are. This probably stems from parental encouragement early in life, but paired with the enormity of modern portions it has become a recipe for disaster. In a society which produces around 50% more food than is needed to feed its population, overindulgence seems natural ("Obesity 2006").

Medically, obesity is defined as "an excessively high amount of body fat or adipose tissue in relation to lean body mass" (Menifield). Obese individuals are classified as having a BMI, or body mass index, of thirty or greater (Ward-Smith). This measurement is determined through an equation relating one's height to their weight. A great number and variety of health risks come along with excess fat. For example, rising rates of diabetes mellitus in America have been closely correlated with obesity (Ward-Smith). Of course, symptoms such as high blood pressure and high cholesterol are commonly found in overweight individuals. As their body fat percentage increases, these symptoms only worsen, eventually leading to conditions such as coronary heart disease and liver damage. According to the CDC, other common co-morbidities include certain cancers, sleep apnea, osteoarthritis, and fertility issues ("The Health Effects"). Many of these symptoms are very dangerous, and can lead to an early death by means such as stroke or heart attack, or simple cessation of breathing. The higher an individual's weight rises past a healthy level, the higher the likelihood they will develop one if not more of these conditions. On top of this, it is much more difficult to provide obese individuals with medical treatment. Anesthesia becomes more dangerous, and often times their sheer volume presents an

obstacle to certain surgeries. If an invasive procedure does occur, there is a greater danger of the wound rupturing post-op

However, other health concerns may be more than just skin deep. Often, obesity has deep-seated roots in one's mentality. As a result, there have been direct associations found between obesity and mental illness such as chronic depression (Menifield).

Obesity may not only deprive an individual of their health, but their money as well. In 2000, it was estimated that in a single year overweight and obese individuals cost America $117 billion in medical expenses. One study's data "revealed that obesity rates decreased dramatically in states as per capita health care spending increased" (Menifield). Due to the array of health issues they tend to suffer from, the obese typically spend much more on healthcare than the average American, by about 42%, or $1,429 per year (Ward-Smith). As their conditions worsen, it is not uncommon for them to lose work time or become dependent on disability, further straining the economy (Ward-Smith). If they progress past the point of being unable to support or even care for themselves, they become a burden on taxpayers. More and more nursing homes and long term care facilities are becoming filled with patients who have grown so large they are unable to function without assistance. These cases often require larger custom beds, special mobility equipment, and a greater number of staff to treat them.

Rather than rely on hunger as a signal to eat, people increasingly turn to food for inappropriate reasons. By turning to food for comfort, celebration, and every other emotional up or down, they may come to rely and depend on indulgence. Though many may feel powerless to change their lifestyles, by taking responsibility for their health and bodies, they will come to practice and learn healthful habits. Cutting out junk food and including nutritious meals may be difficult at first, but in the long run those that chose to change will see improvement in their health and mood. Exercise, of course, is another excellent means of losing weight. Additionally, routine things like sleep should not be neglected, with those getting between six to eight hours of sleep per day seeing the most consistent weight loss ("Obesity 2012"). For those seeing no success with traditional weight loss methods, bariatric surgery may provide an alternative. These procedures aim to limit appetite by decreasing the size of the stomach in one way or another. Though only the more overweight are candidates for bariatric treatment, on average they are expected to lose 50% to 75% of their original weight. Furthermore, this loss is often accompanied by the lessening and even disappearance of comorbidities such as sleep apnea and diabetes. Others may turn to prescription medication, though many diet pills have their own dangerous side effects (Ward-Smith).

In some cases, the government may offer potential means of changing the face of America's health. Nationwide, legislative efforts are being made to limit risk factors such as fast food and promote adequate and accessible nutrition. Through funding food providers such as the Women, Infants, and Children feeding program, some hope to directly ensure the nutrition of both current and future generations (Kozikowski).

As children spend a good deal of their time in class, it is important to recognize the role schools can play in the fight against obesity. Another example of governmental intervention, The *Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act of 2010* was passed in hopes of addressing the level of nutrition children receive in school. Its contents detail plans to end childhood hunger while changing a variety of nutritional requirements and standards for food served in schools. At the same time, it puts policies in place to educate citizens and students about health and fitness in order to decrease

their risk of becoming overweight (United States). Of course, parents should also take an active part in ensuring their children receive proper nutrition. Additionally, they should encourage regular exercise and always lead by example through practicing healthy habits themselves.

On the other hand, there are those who believe that weight isn't an issue. Linda Bacon, founder of the Health at Every Size Lifestyle, argues that there's no direct correlation between one's weight and their health. Rather than rely on the traditional weight loss method of eating less and exercising more, her approach focuses on feelings of satisfaction, confidence, and the incorporation of enjoyable physical activity. At the same time, she feels that those who embark on diets may be doing their bodies more harm than good in the long run. Her philosophy explains that everyone's body has a unique 'set point' for weight which is predetermined by their genetics. Through dieting, one risks damaging their metabolism as they move further away from this point. This could result in slower weight loss, a newly raised 'set point' to compensate for lack of food, and even greater potential for over eating and weight gain in the future. By denying themselves the foods they enjoy, Bacon believes dieters only set themselves up for failure in the form of yo-yo dieting. Furthermore, one study found that those who enjoy what they're eating tend to absorb more nutrients from their meals. Bacon has more good news for the overweight, citing a study which claims the overweight enjoy a longer life expectancy than their thinner counterparts. In her opinion, by putting an emphasis on weight instead of overall health, doctors are doing their patients a disservice (Schons).

While self-confidence and satisfaction are both important parts of a balanced life, they are not indicative of one's physical health. By spreading the notion that those of any size can be physically healthy, Bacon encourages complacency. Worse yet, those who gain significant amounts of weight are less likely to care if they think their health will see no impact. Though weight itself may just be a number, excessive body fat is not simply a matter of physical appearance. The links between obesity and certain diseases should not be trivialized or ignored. People should have the freedom to choose and enjoy what they put into their bodies, but these choices should be healthy more often than not. To combat weight gain, the individual must first accept responsibility for their health. A study performed in North Carolina showed that "nearly one-third of the overweight Blue Cross and Blue Shield members described their weight as "just right," as did 5% of the obese enrollees" (Ward-Smith). If overweight and obese Americans continue to perceive their weight as healthy, why should they make any attempt to change it? This so called "fat acceptance" has only exacerbated the present crisis.

Americans need to open their eyes. Now more than ever, their habits and choices are imperiling their own lives as well as those of future generations. There are far too many dangers associated with obesity to portray it as a matter of mere physical appearance. Like any other disease, it should be treated as such and be remedied by whatever means possible. Rather than accept it as a fact of life, individual sufferers should be encouraged to combat their condition in an effort to achieve overall health and earn longer lives. While obesity rates continue to soar, it is not too late to try to fight the trend. The upcoming generation still has a chance to develop healthy relationships between their bodies, food, and exercise and maintain a greater standard of health throughout their lives. By promoting overall awareness of this crisis and avoiding the promotion of misconceptions, American society may be able to undo the damage it has done to the health of the bodies and minds of its citizens.

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Rhetorical Analysis
27 February 2015

"In Defense of Darkness" Analysis

Through her essay "In Defense of Darkness," Holly Wren Spaulding exposes the brighter side of the dark. She argues that is has much emotional, spiritual, and environmental value and shouldn't be ignored or feared. In her eyes, people do themselves a disservice by purposely avoiding this necessary and natural aspect of life. By re-immersing their minds in this unique setting, she feels as though individuals can learn much about themselves as well as the world they live in and its other inhabitants.

By repeatedly using personal testimony, Spaulding is able to make her statements much more immersive and relatable. She frequently paints detailed pictures of her past experiences, highlighting the beauty and sense of awe and mystery in the scenes she bore witness to. For example, she recalls a trip to Sentinel rock and "…looking at the dark sky and the moving lights above us, we wondered about the top secret tests that the military is said to conduct at Area 51" (83). She also describes another scene in Florence, Italy, where the night is a much livelier environment than one might imagine, filled with "Night travelers – loners, junkies, lovers, and the homeless – [who] were busy living and moving about in the darkness, bursting with what is never imagined during the day" (83). Finally, she recalls a trip taken to a lake with her musician friend, one that led her to "…remember how my senses seemed suddenly more alert," and remark on how "We would likely always remember this journey" (83).

Spaulding's use of her own stories helps readers to insert themselves and visualize the moments she recalls. It is simple for one to imagine herself gazing up at the night sky alongside Spaulding, experiencing the same calm sense of awe and serenity. When she describes her trip to Sentinel rock, namely her thoughts on Area 51, the reader gets a feel for the more mysterious and unknown aspects the night conceals. Through her account of Florencian nightlife, she proves that the night isn't simply made for sleep and quiet, but that it is actually a living, vibrant environment filled with those who may not be able to partake in certain activities under daylight's scrutiny.

On top of her use of personal testimony, Spaulding frequently appeals to the reader's sense of curiosity and spirituality, as well as humanity's genuine need for darkness. At one point, she describes the reactions of her city dweller friends during their visit to her homestead, where "… the sky is like a museum exhibit, and it's novel and compelling because it stands apart from the familiarity of their usual experience" (84). She is happy simply that she's able to awaken curiosity within them via "…something this rare, and indeed, rather magical" (84). When Spaulding allows herself to be surrounded by darkness on her own, she tends to have quite spiritual and revelatory experiences. For her, the darkness is "…one of the places we encounter ourselves in right proportion, or in a more reasonable proportion, to the world around us" (84). Not only does it allow her to properly relate herself to the whole of existence, but it lets her consciousness slip away into a more spiritual realm, believing "…darkness bleeds the boundaries between myself and that which is just beyond my physical form" (85). As a result of these soul-searching endeavors, she emerges feeling "more fully human….because it is a time when I do feel…interconnected with all beings" (86). Aside from the spiritual benefits she finds for herself,

Spaulding helps to remind readers of their own needs which only darkness can fulfill. When it's time to put the day behind oneself and rest, "Nighttime darkness also bears the prospect of sleep and dreams (increasingly precious in this age of insomnia and sleep disorders)" (85). Although a lack of sleep can definitely take a toll on one's body, there is a chance for emotional and mental damage as well. Spaulding confirms this, stating that "When we are estranged from the dark, we lose access to vital human emotions and sensual experiences including wonder and awe and humility" (85).

In this modern age, humans may be damaging themselves far more than they know with their bright lights and avoidance of sleep. Unfortunately, many seem to trivialize its significance, as modern society pushes the demand for constant action and productivity. If they were able to look past this trend, they may find that there's much to be found hiding in the darkness – very little of it frightening or disadvantageous. On a more spiritual level, one may find that darkness is less of a barrier to life than a connective medium to the more profound and necessary aspects of it. By experiencing this and learning what darkness has to offer, the individual may see improvements in not only their physical health, but also their mental and emotional states.

At the same time, Spaulding doesn't narrow mindedly push her own views of darkness. She concedes that artificial light has significant value, provided it's used under the correct circumstances. Though darkness does have many positive things to offer, it also tends to house some of the more dangerous aspects of life, and she realizes that "...of course, there really are dangers that lurk in dark places" (86). Again, she recalls a personal experience in which a rapist was prowling the area near her campus and how she "...was grateful that in general, the streets near my apartment were well lit" (86). Spaulding admits that artificial light serves a definite purpose in certain situations, recognizing that "...it is useful and suitable to light our public spaces to ensure safety" (86). Rather than promote her stance without considering that some may have differing opinions, she both entertains and agrees with certain concerns others may wish to see addressed. As with anything else, she realizes there is a proper time and place for everything in life. Through this realization, it is revealed that darkness is little more than the flip side of light, and that one cannot exist without the other. Neither are inherently bad or good in her eyes; they are just simple facts of nature that can become what one wishes to make of them.

Overall, "In Defense of Darkness" lays out the different beneficial aspects of natural darkness. Rather than fear and banish it from daily life, Spaulding recommends that we embrace it for what it is. Her use of personal testimony, appeals to various values, and fair concession to any potential opposition all help to drive her points home. She believes that there is far more to darkness than meets the eye, and that if one is willing to leave behind their preconceived notions of fear and its connection to darkness, they are likely to discover much about themselves and the entirety of existence. Though it may be hard to look away from the ideals of modern society and technology, she assures readers that the rewards darkness potentially offers are well worth some stargazing.

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Once Upon A Time, In A Land Called America....

Did you ever wish upon a star as a child, truly believing that it could come true? Have you ever thought, "I wish I had a magic wand that I could use to just wave away this mess"? Maybe you heard someone say, "I better head home before I turn into a pumpkin." These actions and statements are inherently recognized by most people. Can you think of one person who does not know the story of Cinderella? A fairy tale, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is defined as "a story (as for children) involving fantastic forces and beings (as fairies, wizards, and goblins); a story in which improbable events lead to a happy ending". These stories date back centuries and have a unique malleability that allows us, as a society, to continuously re-cycle the same stories in new ways. They are neatly centered in the fantasy genre. Our society has a tendency to have some sort of singular fantastical obsession which evolves every few years into another one. Disney, of course, is most notable for producing the animated fairy tale movies of our childhood. I grew up with the classics like Cinderella, Snow White, and Ariel. Later on, in the late nineties, Harry Potter came on the scene and captured the hearts and imaginations of people worldwide. Then, as all good things must come to an end, America looked toward her next fantasy fixation. Enter Twilight. A vampire tidal wave promptly ensued in popular culture. After that it was zombies and stories of dystopian realities, like The Hunger Games. Now, a current trend taking place in American popular culture is the re-emergence of fairy tales. Within recent years, these stories have surged in popularity, taking over the fantasy genre in movies and on television. So what has caused us to once again fall under the spell of the fairy tale genre? This newfound phenomenon is driven by qualities of the human condition that enable us to dream and be curious, causing us to question the state of society and inspiring a voracious appetite for learning the unknown. Despite all the benefits that come with societal progression, we, as all living creatures, feel most secure with the familiar. As such, we require a coping mechanism, mainly our imagination, with which to deal with changes in our society, which then manifests itself in the various mediums of popular culture. Fairy tales subtly and mercurially express our feelings in dealing with the dichotomy between our need to move faster and faster, promoting advancement and efficiency, and a deep seated anxiety about the uncertainty of the future and where all this knowledge will take us.

America is at a point in time where the millennial generation is transitioning into adulthood, and, given the state of the economy, it is not surprising that it has been a somewhat fast (thanks to technology) and challenging advancement (an example of this is the fact that college costs are at an all-time high and a degree no longer guarantees a job). This uncertainty about the future, coupled with the rapid speed of technological advancement causes many young adults to long for the simple times of childhood, which leads to a need to express such feelings creatively and imaginatively. As always, the older generations share their knowledge, experiences, and preferences with the younger ones, and given the present imminent incumbency of a new generation, it is now the perfect moment in time to introduce these youngsters to world of magic and enchantment that used to bring us grownups such joy. What makes this trend so interesting is that it is attractive to children and adults, men and women. The re-emergence and

popularity of fairy tales has some interesting effects in our society, particularly in the areas of mass media and advertising, as well as the promotion of equality between the genders through the creation of strong female role models through newly defined characters and story-lines, and finally in the over-all aid such stories provide in our constant pursuit of defining the unknown.

Fairy tales draw directly on our imagination, our dreams, our fears, our hopes, and our inner desires. Imagination encompasses the more subjective causes of the fairy tale return. With this, we create stories and messages reflecting the mood and feelings of the greater population and communicate them through popular culture. When someone reads a fairy tale or watches a movie, they are experiencing a dream state in which their imagination is ignited by messages and stimuli, absorbed in a cognitively pleasing and entertaining way. At times, everyone gets bored or overwhelmed with the stress of everyday life. The movies and the fantasy genre in particular, represent a highly sought after source for escapism (MacMillan 2), especially when the need to 'unplug' seems to be getting stronger and stronger. Yet, we still find solace through the technology of a motion picture. Why do films affect us so? In his book, The Cinema or the Imaginary Man, Edgar Morin delves into the complexities of the cinematic experience and the fundamental truths it reveals about human nature, reality, illusion, and imagination. He says, "Fantasy rationalizes and objectifies magic, but it keeps its subjective nucleus...Its distinctive characteristic is to create a magical climate within a framework of rational (realist) explanations" (Morin 166). In other words, the fantasy genre is so appealing because it displays an enchanted and magical world that is drawn from the real world we live in, such that it becomes the perfect balance of real and imaginary, a "sort of protein of soul" (Morin 167). This phrase is quite accurate when you think of how the human body utilizes protein in food. These molecules are necessary for maintaining good health and growth as they provide our physical body with strength and energy, just as fantasy provides our psyche with ability to deal with the fears and musings of everyday life. This genre, in effect fuels our souls and imaginations in a healthy manner, so that we avoid becoming too overwhelmed with reality.

Nostalgic appeal is a leading cause of the return of fairy tales. Fairy tales are used to teach children good morals and various lessons about living a virtuous life. Children are fortunate to possess a level of innocence so pure, that they are able to easily accept magic into their imagination. Young adults who are just learning the ropes of reality and responsibility (currently, me and my fellow millennials) can easily feel bombarded by obstacles as they attempt to navigate the road to self-sufficiency. In order to deal with the fears and anxiety about the future, it is natural to find solace in withdrawing from the present and opening up your psyche to the memories of being a child, thus, recalling that lens of wonderment through which you viewed the world before you became plagued with enough logic to learn it was actually scary. Morin also touches on the progression of children's preference in genre as they mature. He makes an interesting observation about the point at which children become skeptical. At around ten or twelve years old, kids begin to see themselves as too old for fantasy and magic. They stop believing in magic just in time for the cynicism of adolescence. "'It is too childish,' say these innocents, who do not know and perhaps will never know that realism hides adult childishness" (Morin 164). We all still have that fascination with magic within us, within the shadow of our inner child. As preteens, we are anxious to shed the inner, and for that matter, the outer appearance of a child and have the freedoms of adulthood. Then later we think, what was the big rush?

This nostalgia would not exist without the original introduction of fairy tales to children. Some argue against the exposure of these stories to kids because of the outdated nature in which they express things like gender roles, unrealistic happy endings and magical happenings. I, however, wholeheartedly disagree with such conclusions. I loved watching fairy tales as a child, and love the newer adaptations that are emerging today. I cannot think of one negative effect that came about in my life from exposure to these tales. Dr. Anthony Zehetner talks about how fairy tales actually benefit childhood development in his article, "Why Fairy Tales Are Still Relevant to Today's Children". According to Zehetner, children are able to find meaning and symbolism in fairy tales which helps them grow emotionally and learn to understand their fears and insecurities in a safe place that is free of pressure. Being engaged in a fairy tale narrative is much more fun than being lectured and yet both scenarios are used to attempt to teach equally important lessons. Through the telling of fairy tales, children are able to see the situation from different perspectives, and choose the right path based on their personal analysis of each character's action. Given a child's level of innocence, they are more apt to grasp right and wrong more than an adult who is aware of the complexities of life that can blur the lines between good and bad choices. The lessons that children learn from fairy tales, although they may seem ostensibly obvious and simple when considered by adults, only appear in this way because they were instilled in us when we were blank slates, so to speak. Through these sorts of moral demonstrations, children are able to comprehend the future and it's convolution through comprehensive and gratifying imagery, encompassed in a magically alluring shell. The lessons include but are not limited to: hard work pays off, "sometimes delayed gratification is necessary" (Zehetner 161), and that "happiness is attained through a satisfactory relationship with others, achieving identity, and contentment within oneself from the path to selfhood" (Zehetner 162). Basically, it would be a mistake not to expose children to the magic of fairy tales because they can use such to depictions to develop emotional maturity and self-identity thus establishing their role in contributing to society.

One reason for our creation and constant retelling of fairy tales is the ease with which it provides us with an outlet to establish visual manifestations of our fears, which is helpful for both children and adults alike. As I mentioned at the start of this essay, the fantasy genre moves through fads that largely can be identified by a magical being of some sort (i.e. vampire, werewolf, zombie, witch). Many times these same archetypes play the role of the villain or bad guy. These characters, these monsters, are the resulting embodiments of the mental concoction of fears, worries and dread that we, as humans, hold deep within out psyche. We use fairy tales to not only express these fears before they consume us, but also warn others about such dangers that exist in everyday life. The clearest example of this kind of fairy tale is the story of Little Red Riding Hood. Using the online textual archive of "The Little Red Riding Hood Project" from students at the University of Southern Mississippi, I read sixteen early versions of this story that were published from 1729 to approximately 1916 (Salda). Though they represented a span of over a hundred years, the story still remains largely unchanged to this day. I believe this is because it is a story that effectively and succinctly evokes a timeless warning and lesson for children, one that is unaffected by progression of times because it has to do with the love and protectiveness a parent feels for their child. Parents want to maintain their kids' innocence as long as possible; however doing this for too long ensures ignorance and naiveté for the future of the child. So at some point the parent must start to make their child aware of evil in the world. As a result, we are met Little Red Riding Hoods adventure with the Big Bad Wolf. The smaller

lessons of the story support the larger one about the existence of evil: always heed your parents, do not gossip, and beware of the wolf in sheep's clothing (Salda). Nevertheless, a lot of other lessons are not impervious to the test of time and must be adjusted to keep up with modernization. We are lucky in that fairy tales possess another quality that enables us to want to relive their glorious and joyful enchantments, the makeup of components that can be easily dissected from the original narrative and manipulated to suit the author's goal, thus possessing elasticity in the narrative that other genres do not possess.

The elements that make up a fairy tale are somewhat like the letter squares for a scrabble game. We know all the letters of the alphabet like the back of our hand but still there is always a different combination or better layout on the board, maybe not even better, but a different way to build a word using the same letters but spelling a completely new word. The same concept can be applied to the characters, themes, motifs, and plots in fairy tales (Jorgensen 219). It is easy to overlook the marketing world when it comes to fairy tales. Yet the "magical worldview" (Jorgensen 217), which is based in our knowledge and experience with fairy tales, is alive and well in the art of advertising. Ever heard the voice-over in a commercial say "Works like magic!"? Television and radio ads are constantly pushing new unbelievable, instantaneous solutions and products that are peppered with guaranteed effectiveness and promise to make life a whole lot better. Jorgensen attributes our tendency to fall for such "amazing deals" to the "contemporary American affinity toward supernatural improvements" (Jorgensen 217). The fairy tales of our childhood instills a need to always hold out hope that some things might actually be 'just like magic'. A big example of 'magical' remedies is in our culture's never-ending quest for ways to slow down the inevitable cycle of life. We are obsessed with maintaining a youthful appearance and preventing death. Susan Cahill discusses the role of the beauty economy and how it is reflected in two different modern fairy tale adaptations in her article, "Through the Looking Glass: Fairy-Tale Cinema and the Spectacle of Femininity in Stardust and The Brothers Grimm". From makeup to plastic surgery to spanx, so many products are out there to improve how you look. These goods and services primarily cater towards female patrons, an occurrence that may be perpetuated by gendered representations that are long cemented throughout the history of popular culture (later I will discuss the presence of gender in such depictions, but for now I just want to establish that such underlying reflections of outdated patriarchal thinking exists, though imperceptibly, in our societal norms. This, coupled with our consumerist attitude that personal happiness can be attained by buying things, establishes a connection between the American fascination with magic, which came about through fairy tales, and how it plays a role in perpetuating our economy.

Fairy tales are fragmented just enough such that their main elements can be easily manipulated and adapted to more contemporary perspectives (Jorgensen 218). Jeana Jorgensen analyzes how American media uses fairy tales and their central characters to create multiple stories that bear little to no resemblance to one another in her article "A Wave of the Magic Wand: Fairy Godmothers in Contemporary American Media". She references an article by Cathy Lynn Preston called "Disrupting the Boundaries of Genre and Gender: Postmodernism and the Fairy Tale", in which Preston claims, "In postmodernity the 'stuff' of fairy tales exists as fragments (princess, frog, slipper, commodity relations in marriage market) in the nebulous realm that we might most simply identify as cultural knowledge" (qtd. in Jorgensen 218). Fairy tales provide the perfect template with which to use to purport any kind of message to the public, and

guarantee that such message will be received given the familiar and magically fantastical way it is expressed. Also, the magical quality ensures that the receiver has a sense of openness in which they are more likely to be accepting of what they do not know, such as their uncertainty of the future. Such a template for this kind of message needs to be pliable in order to be effective, making the fairy tale the perfect instrument to convey it.

Technology and modernity have brought about a new level of complexity to our society. We have fully moved on from a manufacturing society to technological, information-based society. We are constantly looking to update, improve, and adapt old methods and products in order to give them a more effective purpose in our everyday lives. The American culture is quickly, yet almost subliminally changing faster than ever. As the economy evolves, so does the demographic of our population and the viewpoints of those who live and participate in maintaining the norms established in our society. Since the birth of the internet, we have been able to gather knowledge and information on any subject with just a few keystrokes. With so much knowledge available at the tips of our fingers, we might as well have a magic wand. The benefit to such societal changes is that our minds are now able to see different perspectives, which can give us insight into certain flaws in our more traditional way of thinking. We are then able to apply this new level of understanding to the old stories of our childhood. For example, the most recent fairy tales movies have depicted females as the protagonist as well the villain, an observation made by Graeme McMillan in an article in Time Magazine called, "Another Bite of the Poisoned Apple: Why does Pop Culture Love Fairy Tales Again?". More and more, society is shrinking away from the previous super hero fad which was dominated by male lead characters. The feminist movement and has clearly influenced this new twist to the tales, which makes the movies or shows more appealing to a female audience.

With the help of technology, more and more social issues are able to discussed and brought to the attention of the public. Feminism is no exception. Think about the insane success of the film Frozen. Not only did it propel the song "Happy" to the top of the charts, it also probably made hundreds of millions of dollars off of toys, Halloween costumes, and themed party supplies alone. Emma Teitel, in her article, "Happily Ever After, Minus the Prince", discusses some parents' fear that their little girl will develop "'princess syndrome'", a phrase coined by Jennifer Hartstein, a child psychologist and author of a parental advice book. Hartstein believes that little girls who are exposed to too much Cinderella and frilly girly-girl culture will believe "'only appearances matter' to 'don't expect to rely on yourself—you'll need a prince to rescue you'" (Teitel 13). I do not have a degree in psychology but I disagree with Hartstein and believe Frozen is a good example to use to refute her claim. I did not see the movie but in researching this article I talked to Dave Connors, one of my coworkers whose kids were deep in the 'happy' embrace that is the Frozen frenzy. He gave me a synopsis of the plot and it supported what other new fairy tale adaptations have begun to do, and that is purport the protagonist a strong female heroine who is in control of her own agency and learns self-reliance without the aid or rescue of Prince Charming. In fact, Frozen does not, from my albeit second-hand knowledge, does not even really profess romantic love much, if at all. Rather it focuses on a maternal and sisterly love that was at stake and in the end, is re-built. Gender ideology has progressed significantly in the past couple decades. It makes sense that an effect of the new fairy tale would be the promotion of powerful women prevailing in the face of evil and kicking butt without the goal of settling down and marrying Prince Charming (Teitel 13). The Hunger Games is also a great example of female

power and leadership. Katniss Everdeen does let romantic impulse dictate her actions or divert her goal of protecting her family. She endures many obstacles and demonstrates a female's ability to defeat oppression and demonstrates skillful prowess in the physical activities like hunting and fighting, which have been primarily dominated by men in past stories. I do find it interesting however, that even the older narratives are somewhat centered on female characters with specific names and attributes, whereas the prince is vaguely and universally identified as Charming. Perhaps even before we moved passed the 'damsel in distress' scenario, the perpetuators of the tales still liked to talk about women experiencing good fortune and adventure (a notion that is somewhat pleasant in the sense of it foreshadowing what is occurring today within the genre).

Consider how this genre has evolved over the past decade: from the classics like Frankenstein and Dracula, and all their various adaptations, to ghost movies like Ghostbusters and Casper, to the magical world of Hogwarts, to more vampires with movies the Twilight Saga and shows like True Blood, to zombies with shows The Walking Dead and movies like World War Z. Zombies led to more post-apocalypse, dystopian type movies like the ever-popular Hunger Games series and Divergent. Finally this pattern as brought us to fairy tales which are comforting to us as they bring us back to our childhood, and satisfy our need for escapism Fairy tales are not just stories past along from generation to generation. In fact they are much more than that. The present occurrence of mass adaptations of these familiar stories in movies and on television is due an almost formulaic composition of factors that have to do with both the human psyche and societal changes. If the causes were transformed into a recipe it might read: two cups imagination, one cup of escapism, a tablespoon of nostalgia, mix together with two cups of technology, half a cup of feminism, and a dash of advertising, bake until the your twenties, and frost with a new generation of children and you got yourself a deliciously addicting, present day fairy tale cultural phenomenon. Humans are constantly dealing with and underlying dichotomy: a hunger for fast societal advancement and the comfort of our roots and traditions. The new fairy tales are the product of this parallel, and provide the right amount realism and fantasy so that we can directly relate them to our own lives. I mean, come on, doesn't everyone want to live happily ever after?

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